OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

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SEGA | NINTENDO | ...AIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBIL...

THE IMMORTAL

AND YOU THOUGHT MORTAL KOMBAT WAS ALL ABOUT THE FATALITIES...

THE MAKING OF... BLAST CORPS

MAYHEM, DESTRUCTION AND DEVASTATION WITH RARE'S MOST INNOVATIVE N64 GAME



SPACE INVADERS

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL ARCADE GAMES OF ALL TIME

ICE CREAM! ICE CREAM!

SPEEDBALL 2

THE FUTURISTIC SPORTS TITLE SPEARHEADS 20 YEARS OF THE BITMAP BROTHERS

BARGAIN HUNT

EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED

WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR COMPLETE LISTING

COMPLETE LOWDOWN

WORMS

UNEARTHING TEAM 17'S WARRING ANNELIDS

FEATURED THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

GAME GEAR
DISCOVER SEGA'S ATTEMPT TO HIJACK THE HANDHELD MARKET

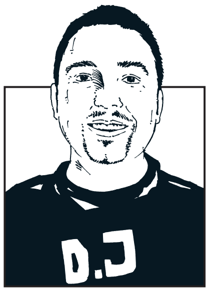
METRO-CROSS
LEARN HOW TO JUMP COKE CANS WITH STYLE IN A NAMCO CLASSIC

MINER 2049er
BIG HOUSE ON THIS PLATFORMER THAT INSPIRED MATTHEW SMITH'S CLASSIC

GET DEXTER
LOOKING BACK AT THE AMSTRAD'S GREATEST ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE

THE RETROBATES

HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE SPACE INVADERS?



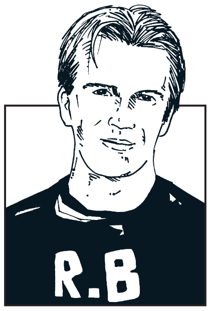
DARRAN JONES

I wouldn't change it at all. I'd simply travel back in time and make sure that my own version came out before Taito's. I'd then sit back and roll around in all the money I've earned while laughing maniacally.

Expertise: Crushing *Magic: The Gathering* players online

Currently playing:
Magic: The Gathering Online

Favourite game of all time: *Robotron: 2084*



RICHARD BURTON

Other than adding power-ups, end-of-level bosses, a simultaneous two-player option and hidden levels, what else can you do to it? Maybe something along the lines of cattle mutilation as in *Majestic Twelve*?

Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming

Currently playing:
Freya's Dribbly Milko Burp

Favourite game of all time: *Manic Miner*



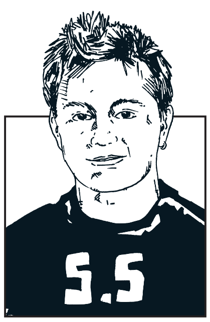
ASHLEY DAY

Improve *Space Invaders*? Well, if Taito hasn't been able to do it after 29 years what chance do I have? Let's leave it in the past where it belongs

Expertise: Making the second best retro gaming magazine

Currently playing:
The Mercenaries (Resident Evil 4)

Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



SPANNER

Invaders might be historically significant, but it also oozes tedium. I'd improve it by turning that awesome, megalithic cabinet into a Transformer, that's what I'm talking about.

Expertise:
Walking backwards and forwards REALLY slowly

Currently playing:
Hide & Seek

Favourite game of all time:
Alien Invaders



PAUL DRURY

You probably shouldn't fiddle with something iconic, but I once played *Pong* with my feet, so how about a rhythm action version where you tap out 22 and 14 with your left foot and then shoot for the UFO with your right?

Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits

Currently playing:
The Pit

Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*



CRAIG GRANNELL

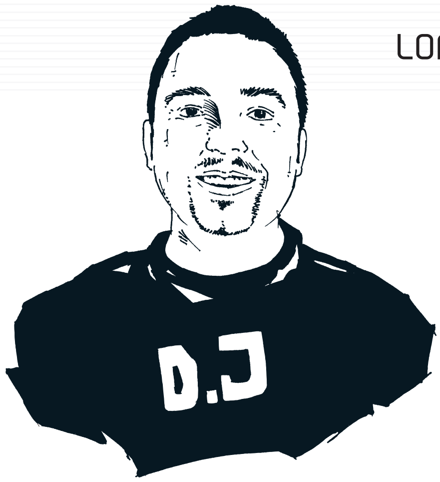
I don't know about the game, but they could improve *Space Invader* crisps simply by bringing them back. Then again, they may be in my rose-tinted nostalgia bucket, along with *Pacers* and *Bagpuss*.

Expertise: Getting badly sunburned while gardening

Currently playing:
Digging up the garden

Favourite game of all time: *H.E.R.O.*

LOADING...



Once upon a time the summer months were to be feared within the games industry. Publishers would typically hold back the very best games until the final quarter, while the majority of gaming magazines would rely on bumped-up preview sections and generic features, normally about E3 or how X, Y and Z will help change the industry.

Fortunately, **Retro Gamer** is not like most other magazines, and amazingly, I've been playing a whole slew of what would be considered triple-A releases.

The games in question are ones I've downloaded from the likes of Xbox Live Arcade and the Virtual Console, but you can't deny that they've added a welcome release from the usual summer drought.

Paper Mario, *Golden Axe*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Crash Bandicoot* are a few of the games that I've completed over the last few months, with new ones being added every single week.

It's not just download services that are overflowing with great content though, this issue is stuffed full of great features, even if I do say so myself.

The Bitmap Brothers, *Space Invaders*, *Worms* and Rare's classic *Blast Corps* have huge in-depth features this month, fully proving that the gaming summer drought doesn't affect everyone.



Enjoy the magazine





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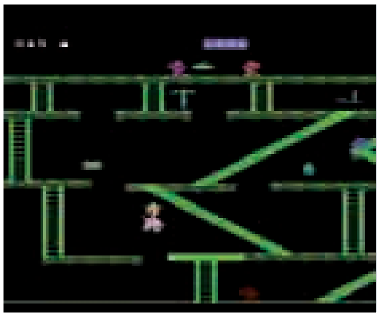
BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

COMPANY PROFILE









INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…

ESSENTIALS

COMPLETE LOWDOWN



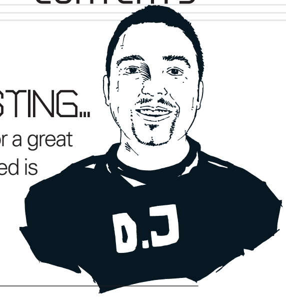
THE MAKING OF...



RETRORATED

THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



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p100









THE MAKING OF...
BATMAN THE MOVIE

RETROINSPECTION
GAME GEAR

THE MAKING OF...
BLAST CORPS

RETRORADAR

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…



Could this be the game that leaves the future of the shoot-'em-up genre hanging in the balance?

SÖLDNERING ON

TASTY INFO ON SIDEQUEST STUDIO'S GROUND BREAKING NEW SHOOT-'EM-UP

We first covered SideQuest Studio's *Söldner-X Himmelsstürmer* back in issue 39, but since then, several new bits of information have been released. So we thought we'd share them with you.

Funded by popular Japanese importer Play-Asia, *Söldner-X* is a potentially risky project for everyone involved; mainly because shoot-'em-ups aren't exactly the safest bet in a world obsessed with cutting-edge technology and the latest *FIFA* or *Need For Speed* game, but Play-Asia's manager Tom Wiesinger is confident that *Söldner-X* will be successful, even if it is SideQuest's first commercial release.

"I wish there was a safe bet, especially for a first-time development," begins Wiesinger about the new venture, "but honestly, I think the most important thing will be the quality of the actual game. Of course we are hoping for active support from the shoot-'em-up community, but we're also going to try to reach gamers that are still new to the genre.

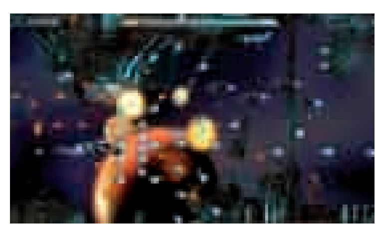
Nevertheless, future releases will of course also depend on the commercial success of *Söldner-X*. If the acceptance is big enough, you can surely expect more games of its kind from SideQuest Studios in the future."

While cynical fans of the genre have already suggested *Söldner-X* is Play-Asia jumping on the *Last Hope* bandwagon, and that the finished product is going to be yet another poorly designed shooter – many purists feel that Westerners are incapable of making decent shmups – Wiesinger is confident that *Söldner-X* has what it takes to appease the hardcore.

"The person in charge of this project has more than 20 years worth of experience in this field and has previously worked for several renowned developers," he explains. "We are mixing classical gameplay with graphics that represent today's standards. So if you are an avid fan of this genre but simply want a videogame that also looks great on your big screen, then *Söldner-X* will be the perfect match for you. Needless to say,

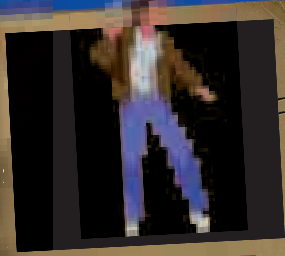


Thanks to its high-resolution visual prowess, SideQuest Studio's brand new shooter is already looking mighty purdy. But will it have the gameplay to match? Here's hoping.



A game with classic-style gameplay but next-gen visuals could be exactly what we've all been waiting for.

HERO OF THE MONTH



CONRAD B HEART

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *Flashback's* memorable amnesiac.

First appearance: *Flashback*

Distinguishing features: A rather natty leather jacket

Weapon of choice: Well, he's fairly handy with a gun

Most likely to: Make the Prince of Persia cry with his fluid animation

Least likely to: Remember his wife's birthday. D'oh!

Interesting fact: Despite what many people think, *Flashback* was not the sequel to *Another World*, that was actually *Heart Of The Alien*

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 23: SPACE HARRIER II



Curse you, Sega. We loved *Space Harrier*, but we'll never forgive you for unleashing the blight, that was *Space Harrier II*. Especially as the title screen promised so much. It had the dude with the gun under his arm, and the chequered floor – hell, there was even one of those big Mechs with the red eyes. Shame it was so pants.

JUST IN

HOLY MOLEY! JUST AS WE WERE GOING TO PRESS SQUARE ENIX REVEALED THAT DRAGON QUEST IV, V AND VI WOULD BE REMADE FOR THE NINTENDO DS



While it's not a Danmaku shooter, there are more than enough enemies on screen to keep you busy.

the game doesn't only look good, it obviously plays well too. Besides the technical point of view, we have spent a lot of time thinking about features that are new to the genre and that will also encourage experienced gamers to replay the game several times. For instance, *Söldner-X* will feature online capabilities that we believe no other game in the genre so far offers."

Indeed, just by looking at the hi-res visuals scattered around these pages you can already see that SideQuest's shooter is looking rather lush, and hopefully, the announced gameplay mechanics will match the impressive-looking visuals. Unlike many games in the genre, which now feature intricate bullet patterns for your ship to weave through, *Söldner X* will be a more tactical shooter. As well as the standard power-ups that are the bread and butter of any decent shmup, *Söldner-X* will also feature over 20 special extras that will have both positive and negative impacts on actual gameplay. Interestingly, some negative effects can actually prove beneficial to the player if used at the right moment, so while you might normally avoid something that will slow your ship down by 50 per cent, it will become extremely useful for sections that require precise steering. The are five



No shooter is complete without an asteroid field to blast through, and *Söldner-X* is no exception.

basic weapon types on offer and each one features its own energy bar. While your two standard weapons will automatically refill once they are depleted, more powerful types can only be used once, so you must be sure to take care if you want to get the best out of them.

Throw in effects like fog, lightning and rain, as well as additional mechanics, like the fact that each weapon type will have a different effect on each enemy, and SideQuest's shooter sounds more desirable by the minute.

The only thing that has yet to be revealed by the two companies is what system the game will appear on. The visuals and widescreen support have immediately ruled out the Dreamcast by many fans, and it's looking likely that *Söldner-X*'s debut will be on either the PC, 360 or PS3 (the latter, possibly as network games). Let's just hope that Play-Asia and SideQuest Studios can live up to all the hype.

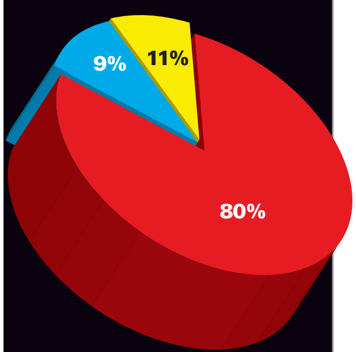
HOT TOPICS

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A BRAND NEW SHOOT-'EM-UP?

Yes, it's always nice when a brand new shooter is released **80%**

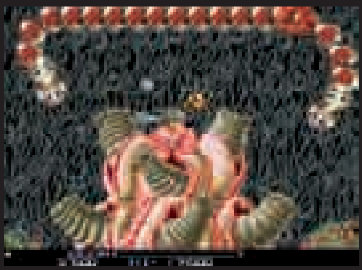
No, Westerner's can't make decent shmups at all **11%**

I really couldn't care less, all shoot-'em-ups are boring memory games requiring no skill **9%**



THIS MONTH WE'VE BEEN MOSTLY PLAYING...

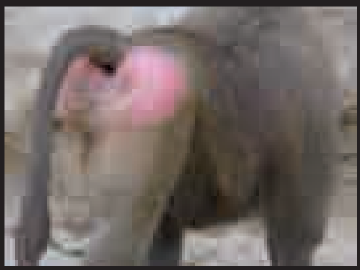
IN ANTICIPATION OF SÖLDNER-X, WE FELT IT WAS THE PERFECT EXCUSE TO REPLAY THROUGH SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE SHOOTERS



» Something tells us we're not the only ones that have been delighting in a little *R-Type* this month.

R-TYPE

There's something about Irem's *R-Type* that lures us back in every time. Maybe it's the fact that it's so obviously inspired by Giger's *Alien*, or it could be its amazing weapon system, tight-as-a-drum level design and excellent music. Whatever it is, we simply can't get enough of it.



» *X-Multiply*: the ugliest game on the planet… hang on, that's a monkey's bottom. Can someone sort this screenshot?

X-MULTIPLY

Yes it's uglier than a Baboon's bum, but *X-Multiply* should certainly be considered if you fancy a little tactical shooting. Created once again by those clever bods at *Irem*, *X-Multiply's* unique feature is your ship's two arms that can be used to shield you from enemy bullets.



» The truth behind how Darran got into videogame journalism is finally revealed.

PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

Darran wanted to be a dinosaur hunter when he was younger, but his parents didn't have the heart to tell him that they were already extinct. When he found out, five years ago, he decided to become a games journalist.



» And we thought a salamander was a little amphibious lizard-like creature.

SALAMANDER

***Salamander* is sort of like *Gradius* but it isn't, which probably explains why Konami was able to release two separate collections – one for *Gradius* and one for *Salamander* – on the PSP. The original is still a fine shooter, even if the boss that resides at the end of Level 1 still freaks us out.**

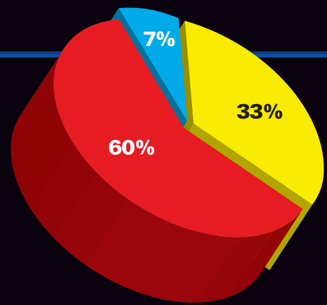
» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

HOT TOPICS

IS THERE A PLACE FOR GAME BOY ADVANCE?

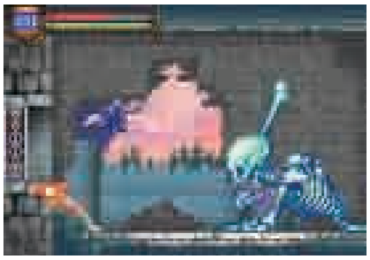
No, I'd rather Nintendo concentrated on the DS **33%**
Yes, it's still a very important brand **60%**
I'm all about the PSP **7%**



GAME OVER?

AFTER 18 YEARS, COULD NINTENDO BE DISCONTINUING THE GAME BOY BRAND?

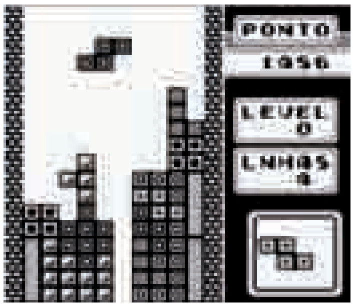
Nintendo's Game Boy has become synonymous with handheld gaming for nearly two decades now, but amazingly, it would appear that Nintendo could well be considering dropping one of its most successful and famous consoles.



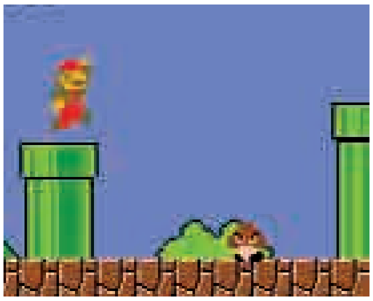
Konami's vampire slaying franchise really managed to come of age on the GBA.

In a recent E3 interview with *GameDaily BIZ*, Nintendo of America's senior vice president of marketing, George Harrison revealed the following information: "This year in our marketing you really won't see much push against Game Boy itself, so it will kind of seek its own level. It's hard to say in the future if we will ever bring back the Game Boy trademark. It was a big risk for us to actually pass on it and call the new product the Nintendo DS, but it was part of Mr Iwata's philosophy that if we're going to make a radical difference and try to reach a new audience, then we have to change the name… We had to make a break even though we had one of the greatest trademarks in the history of the industry."

Granted, it's not firm news from Nintendo, but when you consider the sheer impact that the DS has had since it was released in 2004, you can't help but wonder what exactly Nintendo plans to do. Most of Nintendo's R&D departments are now working on new Wii and DS titles, and while the last Game Boy release, the Micro, sold nearly 2.5 million units, it's sold nowhere near as well as the Game Boy Advance SP, which has sold over 41 million units and still manages to outsell the PlayStation 3 on a monthly basis. Indeed, last month alone in the US the GBA shifted over 113,000 units.



It's simpler than breaking out of a wet paper bag, but the impact of *Tetris* on the Game Boy should not be forgotten.



Super Mario Bros Deluxe. A near identical port of the classic NES game? Yes please.

Regardless of the Game Boy's future however, there can be no denying the sheer success of the DS, especially when you consider that in the three short years since its release it has managed to sell over 40 million units worldwide. Add in the fact that it can also play Game Boy Advance titles and it's little wonder that the ratio of DS to Game Boy Advance titles getting released is greatly increasing. No matter what the Game Boy's future is, it's obvious that Nintendo's DS is here to stay and has become as recognisable a brand name as its older brother. Not bad for a console that was once announced to an unsuspecting world as Nintendo's third pillar…

A BRIEF GAME BOY TIMELINE



GAME BOY
RELEASED **1989**



GAME BOY POCKET
RELEASED **1996**



GAME BOY COLOR
RELEASED **1998**



GAME BOY ADVANCE
RELEASED **2001**



GAME BOY ADVANCE SP
RELEASED **2003**



GAME BOY MICRO
RELEASED: **2005**

FINAL FANTASY SQUARED

IT'S A NEW FINAL FANTASY, ONLY IT'S NOT

Listening very carefully? Can you hear it? That's the sound of *Final Fantasy* lowing in protest as Square milks yet another game from its lucrative cash cow. Of course, we shouldn't be too cynical – after all, we'd buy a remake of *FFVII* quicker than you could say 'didn't Aeris die in that?' – but it does make you wonder how much mileage Square Enix can continue to get out of one of its most popular franchises.

Still, *Final Fantasy II: Anniversary Collection* has been announced for the PSP and like this year's re-imagining of *FF* it will feature redrawn visuals and a new widescreen mode. There will even be a brand new dungeon to explore, making this the definitive version of *Final Fantasy* to own.

Keeping with the theme, Square Enix will also be releasing *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War Of The Lions*. Boasting brand new CGI cut-scenes and a variety of jobs to choose from, and new plot elements, this new PSP title has jumped to the top of our most-wanted list. In fact we're looking forward to playing it so much that we're more than happy to give those udders a good old tug ourselves, if only to see if brand new games are actually squeezed out of them.



All right, so it's just the old game with a fresh lick of paint, but we're still going to buy *Final Fantasy II*.

MONKEY TROUBLE

NEW VIDEOGAME DOCUMENTARY COURTS CONTROVERSY

No matter what I say it draws controversy. It's sort of like the abortion issue." With those infamous words Billy Mitchell sets the tone for *The King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters,* Picturehouse's brand new videogame documentary.

Directed by Seth Gordon and starring Mitchell, Steve Wiebe, Walter Day and the recently deceased Doris Self, *The King Of Kong* is a documentary detailing the lengths Wiebe and Mitchell will go to in order to lay claim to the highest score on Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*. A hit at this year's Slamdance film festival and recently released in US cinemas, hopes are high that *The King Of Kong* will make it to the UK, as it looks set to be a fascinating window into the lengths that certain gamers will go to, in order to be the best of the best. Unsurprisingly, Mitchell isn't too impressed with being painted as the documentary's villain, and a great many facts have apparently been glossed over in order to make the documentary as entertaining as possible. Even so, *The King Of Kong* remains on our must-see list. Oh, and we know *Donkey Kong* is an ape and not a monkey; we just wanted a catchy title.

COMING SOON...

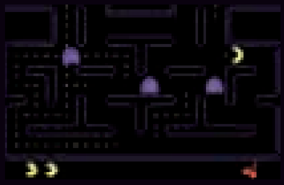
WITH THE KING OF KONG CURRENTLY DOING THE BUSINESS IN THE US, HERE ARE FOUR VIDEOGAMES WE'D LOVE TO SEE TURNED INTO MOVIES...



SHINOBI
We'd cast Jet Li as the heroic Joe Musashi, have the director of *Hero* (we forget his name) directing it, and have Jet rescuing children who all look like that kid from the first *Matrix*.



WORMS
300 worms stand up to a million spiders in our insectoid take on Frank Millar's *300*. We'd stay true to the original, but we'd spice it up with exploding sheep and concrete donkeys.



PAC-MAN
Mr Pac-Man wakes up in a maze with four friends. Following a trail of pills, he eats them and starts to hallucinate that his mates are ghosts; leading him on a murderous rampage.



BAD DUDES VS DRAGON NINJA
Coreys Haim and Feldman return in an adventure that would normally star Charlie Sheen and Emilio Estevez. There's a talisman that they're both looking for. It's not very good.

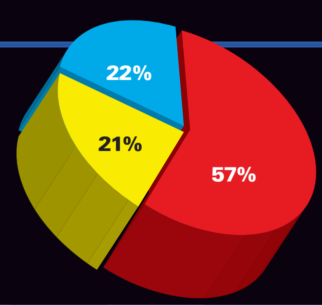
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RETRORADAR

HOT TOPICS

WHO HAS THE BEST DOWNLOAD SERVICE?

Microsoft (Xbox Live Arcade) **57%**
Nintendo (Virtual Console) **22%**
Sony (PlayStation Network) **21%**



THE retro GAMER OPINION

"The PS3 and 360 both have exciting new games in the pipeline but there's no guarantee that they'll actually be any good. So I'm going to have to fall back on the safety net of the Virtual Console selection. They may not all be brilliant but at least I know which to avoid. Besides, no other service has *Shining Force* on the way, does it?"


Ashley Day

"Certainly quantity doesn't replace quality, and in that respect there seems to be an emergent pattern across all platforms: Sega. There's a silent invasion going on behind the scenes, and the once great console giant is playing a deft hand in dominating the download scene. If I had to choose a format, it'd be Sega's multiplatform magnificence, regardless of console."


Spanner

"I'm going to say Sony for the moment. Prices are cheap – *Mortal Kombat II*, £1.99? Yes please – there are already plenty of classic arcade games available (although admittedly nowhere near as many as on the 360) and games like *Everyday Shooter* look right up my street. Oh, and there's loads of PlayStation games that I haven't played to look forward to as well."


Darran Jones

DOWNLOAD HEAVEN

THE OLD-GENERATION GAMES YOU CAN DOWNLOAD ON NEXT-GENERATION CONSOLES

While gamers have been moaning about the lack of triple-A titles for the PS3 and Nintendo Wii, the consoles' download services continue to go from strength to strength.

Microsoft recently delighted gamers with the addition of an arcade-perfect port of Sega's *Golden Axe*, a hi-def version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and a superb online version of *Bomberman*. Meanwhile, Nintendo surprised everyone by releasing the excellent *Paper Mario* in the UK ahead of the eventual US release, along with the excellent *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. However, Sony recently hit back with PSone downloads of *Crash Bandicoot, WipEout* and *Jumping Flash!* for just £3.49.

It would appear, though, that the downloadable content war is just getting started. Nintendo has the most recognisable round-up with NES classics including *Probotector II* and *Super Mario Bros. 3. Shinobi III, Strider, Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* are just a few of the Mega Drive games on the horizon and Konami's *Axelay* is due on the SNES in the coming months, too.

Microsoft also has a collection of titles to look forward to, with *Super Contra, Tempest, Ecco The Dolphin* and *Warlords* all due out soon. Plus, there's *Taito's Exit* – a conversion of its great PSP puzzler – *Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords* and *Every Extreme Extend Extra*.

Last, but by no means least, is Sony, with the likes of a new *LocoRoco, PixelJunk Racer, Everyday Shooter* and Capcom's conversion of the classic board game Talisman. And let's not forget incoming PlayStation titles like *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night, R-Type Delta, Tekken 2* and *Resident Evil: Director's Cut*.

One thing's for sure. Our credit card bills are going to be horrendous.



Ecco The Dolphin heads to Xbox Live Arcade; let's hope it includes the excellent Mega CD



We don't know why you're so happy Sonic; you're going to be running at 50hertz on PAL Wiis.

LOST AND FOUND

LOST ATARI 7800 TITLE FINALLY TURNS UP 18 YEARS LATE

If you're a fan of the Atari 7800, you may just about remember a game entitled *Missing In Action*. Based on the 1984 Chuck Norris film of the same name, *Missing In Action* was set for a 1989 release, but for some reason, never actually made it into stores.

Now, some 18 years later, a prototype of the game has finally been made available on popular Atari website Atari-Age. This is all thanks to regular forum goer, Mitch Orman, a computer analyst from Southern California, who was lucky enough to get his hands on the precious prototype. "It was originally found by the Digital Press guys several years ago and demoed shortly after at a Classic Gaming Convention. Last year they decided to sell it and I was the lucky buyer."

Initially created by TNT Games, *Missing In Action* is a side-scrolling fighter and, so far, is about 85 per cent complete. It's also surprisingly good fun and, if nothing else, proves that it is possible to make a decent videogame starring Chuck Norris. Unbelievable, we know.



Missing In Action has been tracked down and is already available to buy on the world wide web!

Mitch is now selling the game in cartridge form (complete with a manual) and feels that "the brief demo it received several years ago whetted people's interest in the game". Anyone interested in buying this missing piece of history should contact mia@atari7800.org. The price for shipping is $35 (about £17, conversion fans!).

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



RED ARREMER

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would Batman be without the Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Rubbish that's what.

First appearance: Ghosts 'N Goblins

Distinguishing features: Toothy grin

Weapon of choice: Great big claws

Most Likely to: Appear in his own videogame

Least likely to: Appear in his own reality TV show

Unusual fact: When he's not tormenting Sir Arthur, the Red Arremer likes to appear in beat-'em-ups such as *SNK vs. Capcom: Match Of The Millennium* and *SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom*.

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past, that doesn't mean there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



AUGUST 07

RETRO NORTH

Opens: 25 August

Location: Glossop Rugby Union Football Club, Glossop

Entry: £9 per person

Website: www.retronorth.co.uk

With no Retro Fusion currently planned, retro fans are going to have to head to Glossop and enjoy Retro North instead. Organised by Keith Lutener, Retro North is promising celebrities in the form of the Pickford brothers, plenty of competitions to take part in and a variety of different consoles and computers to play on. Oh and beer, lots of beer…



AUGUST 07

WORMS: OPEN WARFARE 2

Released: 31 August

Publisher: THQ

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, DS

Worms Open Warfare was superb fun on the PSP, but somewhat lacking on the DS. This time, though, that's all set to change, as all the little flaws that appeared in the DS outing now appear to have been fixed. Set over a variety of different time periods and with some superb visuals, *Open Warfare 2* promises to be very special indeed.



AUGUST 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

Released: 31 August

Publisher: Atari

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

We're hoping that the reason for *Card Fighters'* lengthy delay is because SNK Playmore is making sure that the game-crippling bug that appears in the US version is going to be taken out. While it's not as good as the original Neo-Geo Pocket title, it's not quite as bad as many have been making out. Expect the definitive review very soon.



AUGUST

ALIEN SYNDROME

Released: 31 August

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

It may be one of Sega's more obscure coin-ops, but we're actually looking forward to *Alien Syndrome*. While the original was basically a sci-fi take on *Gauntlet*, the PS2 update that was released under the Sega Ages banner was a rip-roaring blaster. Early reports suggest that this new update will feature a similar blend of aliens, gunplay and slime. We can't wait.



SEPTEMBER 07

CRAZY TAXI: FARE WARS

Released: 07 September

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Crazy Taxi was one of our favourite Dreamcast games, so it's great to see that it's being shrunken down to fit onto Sony's PSP. Featuring elements from both *Crazy Taxi* and its Dreamcast sequel, *Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars* will be the first game in the franchise's history to offer a multiplayer mode and is bound to be a huge hit with fans of the original. will *The Offspring* decide to return with a new set of tracks though?



OCTOBER 07

SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE

Released: October

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

The original *Sonic Rush* turned out to be a brilliant little platformer on the DS, so we're hoping that Sega will be able to work similar magic with this sequel. While early screenshots look rather promising, we can't say that we're too excited about the fact that Sonic will now be able to use a hang-glider to complete certain levels. Sonic works best when he's racing through levels using just his feet, not transport.



NOVEMBER 07

NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

Released: November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Ever since Sega revealed it was working on a new *NiGHTS* game we've been prancing about like love-sick teenagers. The original Saturn game was a superb title that never reached the audience it deserved, so hopes are high that the high install base for the Wii will more than make up for this. We've not had a chance to play it yet, but once we do you'll know all about it. We can't wait!



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

One of our most anticipated DS titles has slipped to December. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus, this could well be the most distinctive *Zelda* yet.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

WHAT THE…?

Dear Retro Gamer,
Willzer (Me) My Lords – How art thou?

You Very well thank you.

Willzer I have come to your counsel for enlightenment. First I need to know how rare is *Psychic Killer Taroumaru* for the Sega Saturn, can you bless me with your knowledge on this please?

You It's rumoured that only 5,000 copies were ever printed. Hence its incredibly high price on sites like eBay.

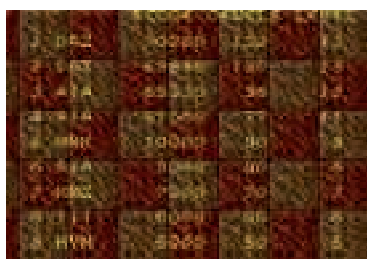
Willzer Secondly, which one of you, my good Lords, has the highest score on *Columns* for the Sega Mega Drive? For I, a mere peasant who has been wearing these pixels for nine years now, would like the opportunity to be equal to you my good Lords. I humbly request the pleasure and privilege of a screenshot of your highest score so that I can try and prove my worth to you.

You Well it's not something that we've played for a long time, but here's our best effort.

Willzer Finally, I have been reading your scriptures (magazine) for quite some time now and must say that it is an honour to be in your presence, thank thee all immensely.

William Swords
Ireland

Um right, thanks for that, William. If we give you a binder and T-Shirt will you please leave us alone, you're starting to scare us.


» Here's Darran's best score. Let's us know if you can beat it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to say well done for reaching your fortieth issue. I've been buying the magazine since the beginning and I'm delighted to say that it just keeps getting better and better. It has its flaws – the odd error here and there, and the waste of space that is the buyer's guide – but I can't remember the last time I read a magazine that was so entertaining.

In fact, to me, it almost feels like you're now documenting history, and I can't think of anyone else, online or otherwise, that offers the same service.

Martin Travers, via email

Thank for your kind words, Martin. We're really pleased to see **Retro Gamer** *reach the grand old age of 40, but we're not going to rest on our laurels, no siree. There will be more to come.*

Even now, we're planning something really exciting for issue 50 and in the meantime you'll start to see a brand new look as your favourite retro magazine gets ever nearer to the big five-0.



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

8-BIT RUBBISH

Dear Darran,
I just wanted to drop you a line to say that while I enjoy **Retro Gamer**, I can't say that I'm very happy about some of the games you've been covering recently.

Parallax, *Barbarian* and *Frogger* are all titles that I have absolutely no interest in and are far too old and crusty when compared to the brilliance of the 16-bit years. Where are all of your articles on *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Mario* and *Zelda*, for example?

Nowhere, that's where! Surely a magazine that's dedicated to retro games, should feature titles that are still being celebrated today, by the majority of gamers. After all, you don't see rubbish like *Manic Miner*, *Monty On The Run* or *Sabre Wulf* being released on the likes of Xbox Live Arcade or Nintendo's Virtual Console? Get rid of all the 8-bit rubbish and give your readers what they really want.

16-bit hero, via email

Maybe I dreamt it, but I'm sure we covered this last month, didn't we?

Anyway, here we go again. **Retro Gamer** *is not written for just one specific person, it's written for a huge community of loyal readers, and therefore, it needs to have articles which will cover a wide range of genres and periods.*

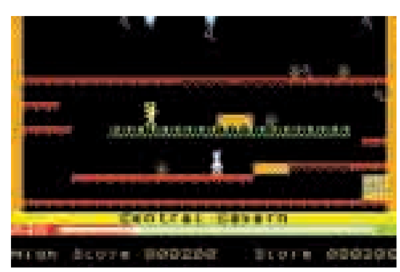
Unfortunately, we aren't able to keep everybody happy all of the time, but we do try our best to keep as many of you happy as much as we can.

If Darran had his way, every month he'd fill it cover to cover with huge blown up sprites from Capcom's Strider, *but then no one would buy the magazine, and he would be out of a job.*

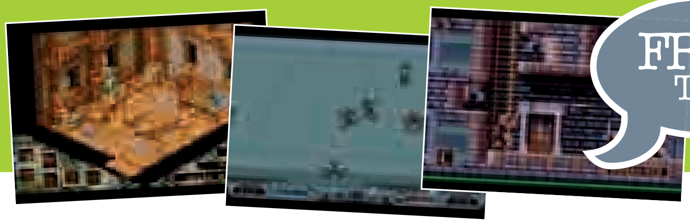
We've always said that **Retro Gamer** *is a balancing act, and we try to make it appeal to as many gamers as possible.*

We can't say that we're very impressed with you bad-mouthing classics like Manic Miner *and* Sabre Wulf *though. Have you even played them?*





» 16-bit hero thinks that there's no room in Retro Gamer for the likes of *Sabre Wulf* and *Manic Miner*. Do you agree with him?



FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE BITMAP BROTHERS GAME WAS

ID: batman877
Chaos Engine, particularly the Amiga CD32 version, with its superior intro and music. For me, it was kind of a classic update of *Gauntlet*!

ID: psj3809
Speedball 2 has to be the best. Nothing's better than beating up your best friend's players during the game. Seeing the ambulance take off his star player, who you've just injured, always brings a smile.

ID: The Master
Yep, definitely *Speedball 2*. Got me into no end of trouble trying to recreate it at the local ice-skating rink. An honourable mention to *Xenon 2* as well though, I had my first ever proper snog while listening to the soundtrack.

ID: paranoid marvin
Well, as the only really decent game they released was *Speedball 2*, the choice isn't that difficult.

ID: Antiriad 2097
I expect some backlash, but I propose *Magic Pockets*.

ID: michaelf
Chaos Engine – not only one of the Amiga's finest two-player games but enhanced enormously by some superb context-sensitive music. All of which was down to Richard Joseph – perhaps his finest on the Amiga.

ID: Shin_Gouki
Xenon, one of the first shmups I played.

ID: NorthWay
Possibly *Cadaver*, and all its add-ons. Because, for once, they didn't push the hardware past choking point like they used to. Nice respectful update of an early-Eighties genre (many years before it became all the fashion).

KEN VS KANO

Dear Retro Gamer,
How on earth can you dedicate eight pages to one of the worst beat-'em-ups ever made, when you've never given *Street Fighter* the same service?

I love Capcom's franchise, and while I applaud you for the *Street Fighter* cover and *Third Strike* article that appeared in issue 33, I'm absolutely devastated that you feel an inferior franchise is worth far more coverage.

Street Fighter II revolutionised the two-dimensional beat-'em-up, while *Mortal Kombat* remained virtually unchanged for over a decade. People only like it because of the fatalities and all the gore, not because it's actually a good game.

Please rectify this massive oversight by covering a complete history of *Street Fighter II* as quickly as possible.

Kindest regards,
Ryu, Edinburgh

Is that your real name, Ryu? Come on, you can tell us the truth. We promise we won't tell anybody.

Anyway, to answer your question, we have already covered the Street Fighter *franchise way back in the Live Publishing days of* **Retro Gamer**, *so we always try and keep away from games and franchises that we've already covered.*

However, if there's enough interest from readers, then we'd consider spreading the Street Fighter *love a little further, especially if it allows us to tell everyone why* Third Strike *is the best 2D fighter ever made.*



» We were going to do a clever Photoshop picture of Ken dragon punching Kano, but we're far too lazy.

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPT 1983



September 1983 – from Acorns come little Electrons, Dragon almost dies, the ZX81 gets cloned, Atic Atac and Lunar Jetman arrive and a thermo-nuclear world war is narrowly averted by a man with a moustache. Richard Burton has his finger on the button…



» The long-awaited little sister to the BBC, the Acorn Electron, finally arrived after a 16-month wait.

The Acorn Electron, which, like Sir Clive's microdrive, had been blighted by delays and technical hitches, was finally released. There had been a 16-month gap between announcement and launch – mainly due to the technical complications in producing the largest custom-built ULA chip in a home micro.

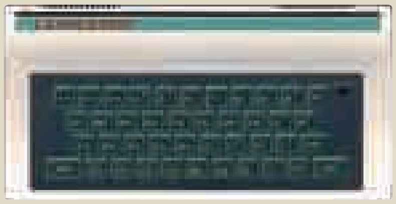
In making such a chip, Acorn hoped that it wouldn't be copied and that cloned versions of the Electron wouldn't appear in Eastern Europe, as happened with Spectrum. With a price tag of £199, it would be interesting to see how the Electron fared against more competitively priced, established home computers.

While the Electron remained a technical sketch on a drawing board, Spectrum forged ahead, out-selling anything vaguely considered to be a computer in the UK. The new boy would need to make an impact on potential purchasers should it want to take a slice of Sinclair's already impressive position in the market.

Another newcomer this month was Sharp's MZ-700 computer. Featuring an in-built printer/plotter and tape deck, the machine would cost around £420. Of course, a computer is only as good as its software base. Luckily, Solo Software launched a host of titles for the new machine ensuring a small but readily available supply of games on the day of launch. Sharp had to point out though, that the machine was intended more as a programmers' machine than a gamers' paradise. Maybe Sharp was covering its back should sales not reach expectations?



» The Sharp MZ700 had the interesting added extra of having a toilet roll dispenser situated on the rear of the machine.



» Lambda Electronics was creating its own attack of the clones with this ZX81 copy, the Lambda 8300. Sinclair wasn't happy…

Sinclair Research had taken exception to Hong Kong computer manufacturer Lambda Electronics for producing a computer that Sinclair claimed was a clone of its ZX81. The Lambda 8300 contained virtually identical internal circuitry and the ROM was indistinguishable.

However, externally the Lambda was a different machine altogether. Aesthetically speaking it looked a lot nicer, with a more reactive keyboard, an in-built speaker and also the quirky feature of pre-defined alien graphics on the number keys. Sinclair wasn't impressed though and sought an injunction to stop production of the machine…

Dragon Data, producer of the Dragon 32 computer, found itself on the brink of going out of business. Luckily, a last minute rescue package of £2.5 million was arranged by the existing shareholders to save the company, for the immediate future.

After only recently attempting to break into the US market with its systems, the company seemingly became embroiled in cash-flow problems after a particularly quiet summer for computer sales. This was exactly the same set of circumstances that Grundy Business Systems found itself in, when it and its micro, the NewBrain, went under in August.

With Dragon 32 sales at around 80,000 since launch, the projected guesstimate of 300,000 units by the end of 1983 looked to be either very optimistic or woefully inaccurate. That said, with Dragon Data still actively developing new products, and software aplenty still being produced, the future for Dragon looked a lot healthier than that of the NewBrain.

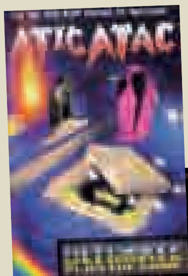
As the home-computing scene got more competitive, so too did the pricing of the systems. Texas Instruments announced it would be cutting the price of its TI99/4a machine from £149.99 to £99.99 and Lowe Computers, which distributed the Colour Genie computer, trimmed its machine price from £192 to £168 while doubling the memory from 16K to 32K. Ultimately, it didn't help its sales much…

Sinclair Research attempted to squeeze the last remaining droplets of life out of the ZX81 by selling the machine with a RAM pack and one game for the knockdown, bargain-bin price of £45. Although Sinclair was keen to prolong the life of its 1K machine, WHSmith was less impressed and decided to stop producing a top ten software chart for it, as it decided not to stock any new ZX81 releases.

With Ultimate Play The Game gathering many admirers with its previous games, it kept the pressure on other companies with two further new releases for the Spectrum. First up was *Atic Atac*, the castle-wandering, key-collecting game that gave you a choice of characters to begin the game with. It also had the brick-hard follow-up to *JetPac*, *Lunar Jetman*, which

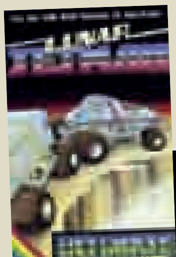


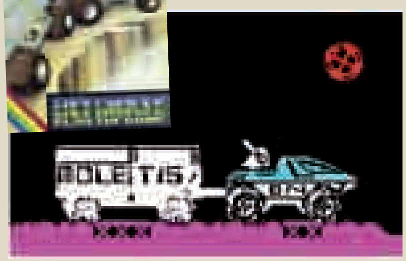
» The Genie couldn't fulfil the one wish its owners had – to have some decent games software to play.





» *Atic Atac* (Spectrum): Another Ultimate classic although a little too easy to complete, which can't normally be said for their games.





» *Lunar Jetman* (Spectrum): Harder than a deep-fried diamond covered in concrete, *Jetman* later spawned the infamous trailer hoax in *Crash*.

would later spawn a *Crash* magazine comic strip and the infamous lost trailer hoax.

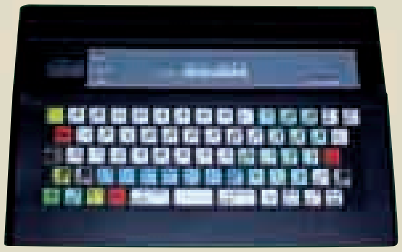
Atari, which had been planning to release its new 5200 console in the UK, decided not to, in favour of promoting its five-year-old wood-grained beastie, the 2600. Software for the 2600 would continue to be available with plenty of new releases appearing via Atari, Activision and Imagic. Atari also announced plans to make a series of peripherals for the machine including a keyboard and a speech synthesiser, in an attempt to push the console as a home computer system.

Imagic, which over the previous months had been annoying Atari with *Demon Attack* – its own interpretation of Atari's official *Phoenix* title – unveiled yet another version of the game, this time for the Philips Videopac G7000 console. Not only was this the first game by Imagic for the system, it was also the first ever independently produced game on the console.

Up until now, Philips had dominated the G7000 software market being the



» Atari's new console was due for a release in the UK, but Atari had second thoughts and pulled the launch.



» The new peripheral aimed at extending the shelf life of the Atari 2600. Note the keys are in alphabetical order.

only producer of software for the console. However, with Imagic starting to dip a toe into the murky waters of the G7000 software market, other game producers were taking a very keen interest in how Imagic's latest offering would fare. Imagic followed up *Demon Attack* shortly afterwards with another conversion of one of its top-selling titles, *Atlantis*.

Brand new software house, Incentive Software, launched this month with its first title, *Splat!*, due out before the end of September on the Spectrum. *Splat!* was a simple non-stop scrolling maze game that required quick reactions as your character, Zippy, negotiated a maze that changed direction without warning while you tried to eat as much grass and plums as you could. If you completed a level, you would get an enthusiastic synthesised 'Yippee' emanating from your Spectrum. Graphically it was nothing special, however, it was a very addictive and extremely frustrating game.

Although not the most high-profile company, Incentive would later go on to have great success producing the Graphic Adventure Creator, which would create a whole new wave of bedroom coders producing homebrew adventure games and the impressive, if somewhat slow,

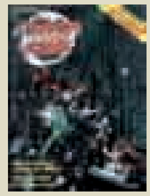


» The Philips Videopac G7000 looked like a big grey Speak & Spell but independent games producers were starting to take



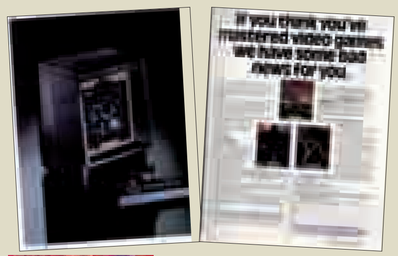
» *Splat!* (Spectrum): Incentive Software's first game was this manic maze game which tested your concentration to the max.

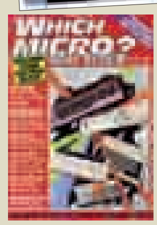
WHAT THE MAGAZINES WERE SAYING…



Computer & Video Games

C&VG, among the masses of type-ins and occasional games reviews, dedicated two pages to highlighting its new Arcade Games Champion, Julian Rignall (apparently he's fluent in Welsh you know). What really caught the eye, though, was the big two-page advert for the recently released Vectrex system from MB Games. Hmmm… Vectrex…

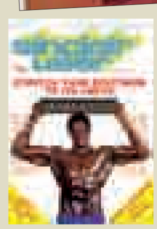




Which Micro? & Software Review

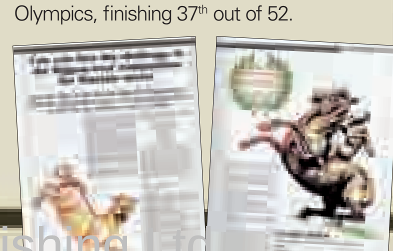
The often-overlooked and underrated magazine, *Which Micro?*, featured one of the first full reviews of the new Acorn Electron, giving it a positive write-up. A review of the new Sharp MZ-700 also featured, but impressed the reviewers less. Maybe the built-in printer and cassette deck was just too much?





Sinclair User

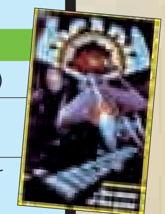
SU's regular feature, User Of The Month, spotlighted Stephen Sowerby, a British Olympic hopeful who, with the aid of his ZX81, was hoping to get to, and win, the modern pentathlon at the 1984 Los Angeles Games. Quite what the ZX81 added to his chances was anyone's guess, although he did make it to the Olympics, finishing 37th out of 52.



CHARTS

SEPT 1983

VIC-20



1 Arcadia (Imagine)
2 Wacky Waiters (Imagine)
3 Cosmic Cruncher (Commodore)
4 Skyhawk (Quicksilva)
5 Gridrunner (Llamasoft)

SPECTRUM



1 Jet Pac (Ultimate)
2 Manic Miner (Bug Byte)
3 Tranz Am (Ultimate)
4 3D Tanx (DK'Tronics)
5 Ah Diddums! (Imagine)

BBC



1 Felix In The Factory (Micropower)
2 Danger UXB (Micropower)
3 Gunsmoke (Software Invasion)
4 3D Bomb Alley (Software Invasion)
5 Super Invaders (Acornsoft)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART SEPT '83

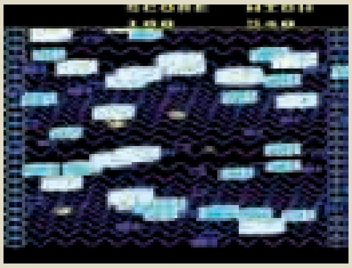
1 Red Red Wine (UB40)
2 Tonight I Celebrate My Love (Peabo Bryson & Roberta Flack)
3 Double Dutch (Malcolm McLaren)
4 What Am I Gonna Do (Rod Stewart)
5 Mama (Genesis)



BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



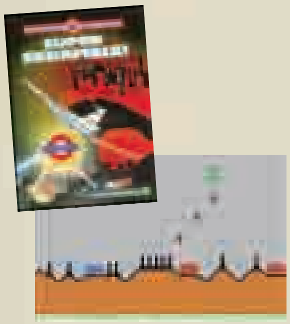
» Vic Computing ended in August to combine forces with the new *Commodore User*, coming to newsagents very soon…



» *Sea Lord* (BBC): A strange little game from Bug Byte, an underwater shoot-'em-up, which is testing due to the confused screen graphics.



» *Maziacs* (Spectrum): Don Priestley created this infuriatingly maddening maze game which still has people tearing their hair out.



» *Super Skramble!* (C64): A good solid game from Terminal Software. Satisfying graphics, pleasant music make a half-decent shooter.

Freescape 3D landscape engine which was used in its future titles *Driller*, *Darkside* and Castle Master.

Although the ZX81 was coming to the end of its natural shelf-life, that didn't stop people releasing really quite pointless gadgets for it. This month saw the Wobble Stopper. No, not a medical breakthrough for particularly bad cases of impotence, it was in fact a piece of metal that stopped your RAM pack from wobbling and potentially killing it in an instant. It had a use, it had a function, and it looked really crap. Still, a bent piece of metal with a tightening screw stuck in the back for £5.25 could be considered reasonable value if it stopped your computer dying. That said, stuffing a few beer mats under the RAM pack was a cheaper, if less hi-tech solution.

There was splendid news for the ever-expanding band of C64 users and ardent Vic-20 supporters. A new magazine was announced that would cater for their every whim, just as long as that whim involved programming and type-ins. The ingeniously titled *Commodore User* (incorporating Vic Computing) would see its debut issue hit the newsstands in October.

C&VG reviews for September included *Manic Miner* (Spectrum, Bug Byte) which earned the blandly titled Reviewers Choice award for top game

NEWS

SEPTEMBER 1983



» How do you like your mushrooms? Stuffed, pureed or highly radioactive? Shiitake!

With the movie *War Games* still fresh in peoples' minds, a real-life nuclear incident was played out on 23 September, one that could have had a less than happy ending. Russian Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov averted a nuclear war after the control room at the early-warning bunker at the Serbukov-15 nuclear command centre began indicating that the USA had launched a nuclear missile at the USSR.

Ordinarily, the officer in charge would verify the threat and contact the Soviet leadership who would issue an immediate no-questions-asked response with a massive counter-strike against the aggressor. Petrov knew the system was erratic, and while his computer indicated a further four missile launches, contrary to procedure, he sided with his gut feeling rather than confirming the launches.

He couldn't be a hundred per cent certain whether it was a system fault or a real attack, only having the information displayed before him to react to. The Soviet hierarchy would retaliate on his analysis and a devastating nuclear war could have ensued with just the press of one button, START (CTAPT in Russian). Luckily Petrov didn't possess an itchy trigger finger…

Rather than receiving praise for his world-saving actions, Petrov was dismissed from the Soviet military for disobeying military procedure. However, in 2006, rather belatedly, he received the World Citizen Award at a meeting at the United Nations.

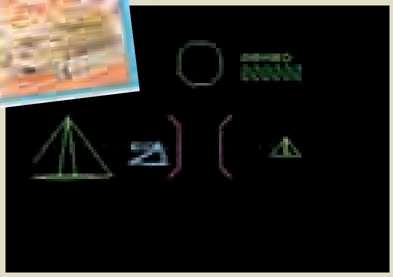
Tip: Play *Theatre Europe*, pretend it's real and fill your pants…



» This man, Stanislav Petrov, saved the world. Not bad for a day's work…



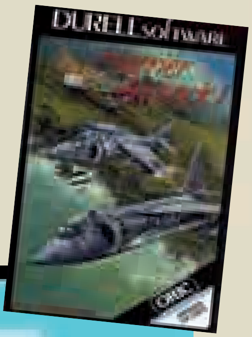
» *3D Combat Zone* (Spectrum): Artic's *Battlezone* clone was top notch, so it was no surprise to find out that it was written by one Jon Ritman.



of the month. Other games, which didn't fare quite so well were *Talking Android Attack* (Dragon 32, Microdeal), *Dig Dug* (Atari, Atari 400/800), *Sea Lord* (BBC, Bug Byte), *Chopper Rescue* (Spectrum, Blaby Games) and *Super Skramble* (C64, Terminal Software).

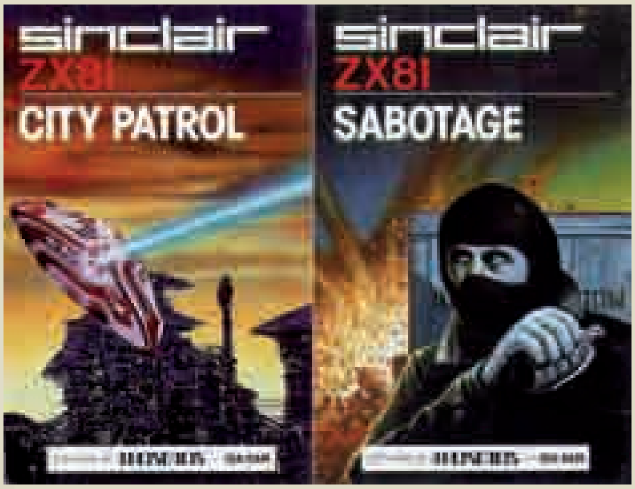
Sinclair User had a below par set of games to review for its readership, saved only by Jon Ritman's excellent *3D Combat Zone* (Artic Computing). Among the other sub-standard gaming fare on offer was *Firebirds* (Softek), *Trax* (Soft Joe's Software) and *Sabotage* and *City Patrol* (both Macronics/Sinclair, ZX81).

The ever diverse reviews from *Popular Computing Weekly* once again covered a good cross-section of systems. Just some of the reviews featured included *Copter Captive* (TI99/4a, Byteware), *Super Dogfight* (C64, Terminal Software), *Apocalypse* (Spectrum, Red Shift), *Oricmunch* (Oric 1, Tansoft), *Savage Toad* (Laser 200, Abbex), *Dictator* (BBC, DK'Tronics), *Dragrunner* (Dragon 32, Cable Software), *Luna Crabs* (Spectrum, Micromega), *Hover Bovver* (C64, Llamasoft), *Serpent's Tomb* (ZX81, Vortex Software), *Harrier Attack* (Oric 1, Durell Software) and the classic *Maziacs* (Spectrum, DK'Tronics).

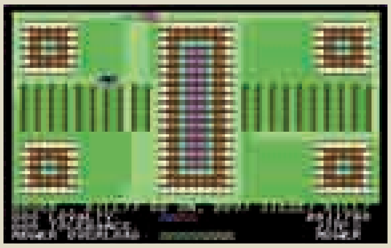


» *Harrier Attack* (Oric): Durell's enduring game was a most needed shot in the arm for the Oric gamer's collection.





» There was life in the old ZX81 yet with a couple of new releases from Macronics and Sinclair.



» *Hover Bovver* (C64): If you want a whacked-out game, please see Mr Minter over at Llamasoft. Weird subject, great game.



CAVEMAN NINJA

THE OLDEST NINJAS IN TOWN



- **PUBLISHER:** NIHON BUSSAN/AV JAPAN
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50 PCB BOARD



HISTORY

What's better than a videogame starring ninjas? A videogame with Caveman Ninjas of course!

Data East has been behind plenty of quirky titles in the past, but its prehistoric platformer *Caveman Ninja* starring Joe and Mac must surely count as one of its most outlandish. Despite being filled with typical platform fare, *Caveman Ninja* somehow felt refreshingly new when it was released back in 1991.

Featuring bold, cartoony character design, some clever level design and some massive dino-bosses, *Caveman Ninja* certainly stood apart from its peers. After all, how many other arcade games of the time allowed you to run along the back of a T-Rex, beat the hell out of a giant carnivorous plant, or allow you to fly through the air courtesy of a far-from-happy pterodactyl?

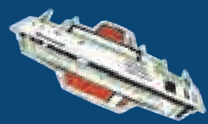
Data East's platformer offered all this and more, and while it stole from plenty of other popular platformers of the time, it somehow managed to make them its own. Alternate routes, jumping on the heads of enemies, collecting fruit to extend your health bar and using prehistoric power-ups like boomerangs and stone wheels had all been seen before, but never had they been combined in such a fun package.

Another aspect that helped *Caveman Ninja* stand apart from its peers was the sheer amount of humour that had been thrown into it. Thanks to the aforementioned visuals, Data East's platformer was brimming with character and you'd often find yourself laughing out loud at the on-screen antics of your Caveman protagonist and his numerous enemies. Meeting a huge reptilian boss for the first time would cause Joe's eyes to comically pop out of his head, while destroying a helicopter resulted in the prehistoric pilot momentarily hanging in the air and managing a few shocked blinks before falling to his death.

Yes it was clichéd as hell, but by golly was *Caveman Ninja* fun, and at the end of the day isn't that what really matters?


WAH







The Definitive SPACE INVADERS

AFTER WARMING UP WITH SOME STRETCHING EXERCISES AND SPARRING BOUTS OVER THE LAST 17 MONTHS, STUART CAMPBELL FINALLY CLIMBS INTO THE RING FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WITH THE 'BIGGEST DADDY' OF ALL. THIS MONTH: ROUND ONE



So… ***Space Invaders***. The game that started the whole thing. Not the first videogame of course – not by a long way – but certainly the one that sent a minor novelty soaring into the stratosphere, gripped the public's imagination and emptied their wallets one coin at a time, giving birth to the multi-billion-pound global industry we know today and therefore directly responsible for the existence of the *Gran Turismo*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy* series. You complete bastard, *Space Invaders*.

It's a measure of the game's epoch-defining influence that, even now, your granny probably still refers to all videogames as '*Space Invaders*'. The funny thing (within certain restricted parameters of 'funny') is that it wasn't even supposed to be called *Space Invaders* at all – the original title of the game was the more technically accurate 'Space Monsters.' After all, they're not invading space, are they? They're invading *from* space. It's sometimes alleged that this is because it was inspired by a 1972 electro-mechanical arcade game by Taito called *Space Monster*, but an American journalist who interviewed *Invaders* creator Toshihiro Nishikado for *EGM* magazine in 2001 claims that this is "in no way" true, though oddly he failed to actually quote Nishikado on the subject in the published article.

(The name confusion, incidentally, extends to Nishikado himself. If you believe *Space Invaders Revolution* on DS, the developer's first name is Tomohiro. On the other hand, the *Taito Legends* retro compilation gives his pre-moniker as Toshihiro, while the early-Nineties home computer releases of *Super Space Invaders* by Domark reckon it's Toshiro. Personally, we like to call him 'Tom-Tosh'.)

According to Nishikado, the game was actually inspired by *Breakout* (it's not hard to see the invaders' rectangular formation in *Breakout*'s brick wall, and swap the bat and ball for a 'Laser Base'), and the invaders themselves were designed after the descriptions of 'octopus-like' aliens in the HG Wells classic *The War Of The Worlds*, having originally been depicted as tanks.

But, anyway, we have almost 30 years of *Space Invaders* to get through and a limited space to do it in, so enough with the background. You all know what *Space Invaders* is about, so let's see what we can tell you that you don't already know. Welcome to the Fantasy Zone. [That's *Space Harrier*, you buffoon. – Ed]

© Taito Corp. 1978

1978
SPACE INVADERS (ARCADE)

Confusion starts early with *Space Invaders*. Even the first game in the series came in a variety of versions – the version most **Retro Gamer** readers will be familiar with is the 'reflector' version produced by Midway for the Western market, where the graphics were reflected through a mirror onto a painted backdrop of a lunar surface, making them appear semi-transparent. The monitor also had strips of coloured cellophane overlaid on it to make the graphics appear green toward the bottom of the screen, white in the middle and orange at the top. The original Japanese sit-down cocktail-table version, however, had a purely black-and-white display with no backdrop (because you were looking directly at the monitor instead of a reflection), and most Japanese versions of the 'reflector' model lacked the green and orange cellophane strips, presenting the graphics all in white. Later revisions in Japan added rainbow-coloured cellophane strips in a variety of reds and blues and purples, and an even later revision displayed the game in full colour. (You can identify this one over the cellophane-colour edition by the way the entire screen washes red when your Laser Base is destroyed.)

Surprisingly, *Space Invaders* was converted to very few home formats in the Seventies and Eighties. Atari had bought the licence for home use, initially on the all-conquering VCS, but while it was happy to allow even the biggest of licensed and original IP to be produced for other formats (like *Centipede*, *Pac-Man*, *Defender* and *Pole Position*, which all saw multi-format releases under the Atarisoft label), *Space Invaders* never appeared on rival consoles like the Colecovision or Intellivision, and not even on home micros like the Apple 2, C64 or Spectrum. Not until midway through the Eighties did an official *Space Invaders* finally show up on a non-Atari platform, and even then it was usually treated abominably – the 1985 NES game, for example, has awful, tiny graphics and sounds like someone throwing a plastic bucket full of canaries down some metal stairs.

» The beautiful 'reflector' version, with backdrop. Note how you can see through the defence bunkers, a feature which few retro releases bother to replicate.



1978
SPACE INVADERS (ATARI VCS)

The VCS version of *Space Invaders* was the first ever killer app, quadrupling the console's sales when it was released at the height of the coin-op's popularity (by which time the VCS was already three years old). Also the first official arcade game to home conversion (not counting dedicated *Pong* machines), it actually bears only the most basic of similarities to its arcade parent. With just 36 invaders instead of 55, three defence bunkers instead of four, several simplifications to the gameplay and crude, ugly graphics, it had to do something to compensate, and it did so by offering a breathtaking 112 variations on the core game design. You could have moving bunkers, zigzagging shots, invisible invaders who only briefly revealed their position when you shot one, and all manner of other options, including a wide and highly inventive range of competitive and co-operative two-player modes. There was even a secret cheat mode (hold down the Reset button when you switch the console on to get a double shot), plus two difficulty settings which effectively increased the number of variations to 224 (or a ludicrous 448 including the double-shot).

It might not have looked much like the *Space Invaders* everyone knew and loved (see Attack Of The Space Mutants, page 26), but the VCS version had so many great qualities of its own that it sold millions, and is still a challenging and exciting game today.



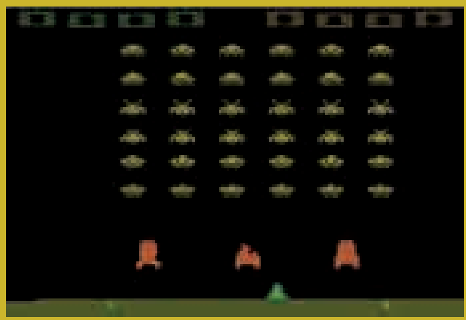
» You could argue that the VCS invaders are more octopus-like, and therefore truer to Nishikado's original vision, than the arcade ones.

The Definitive

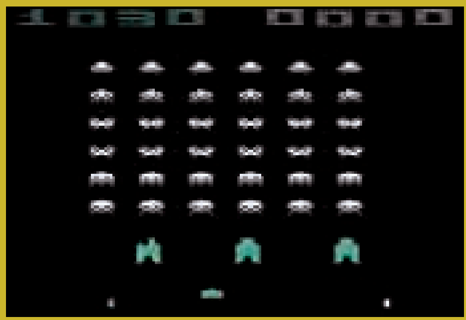
SPACE INVADERS

ATTACK OF THE SPACE MUTANTS

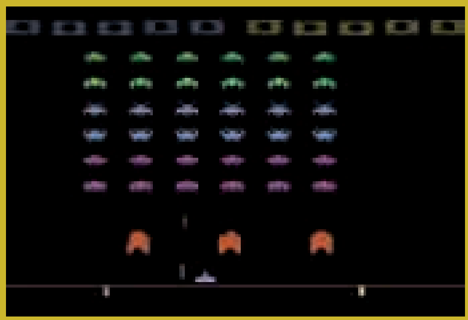
The VCS version of *Invaders* was a little controversial at the time because it didn't resemble its coin-op parent. Most people assumed this was due to unavoidable hardware limitations, but in fact the VCS was entirely capable of producing a far more faithful rendition had Atari chosen to do so. This point has subsequently been proven by a whole raft of homebrew hacks written for VCS emulators (though some of them have been turned into real cartridges, too) – most of them using the same ROM size as the original to avoid accusations of cheating by using more memory than was economically viable in 1978.



» The first version simply altered the graphics to make the invaders look much more like their arcade counterparts.



» A further hack also changed the palette to a much more authentic colour scheme.



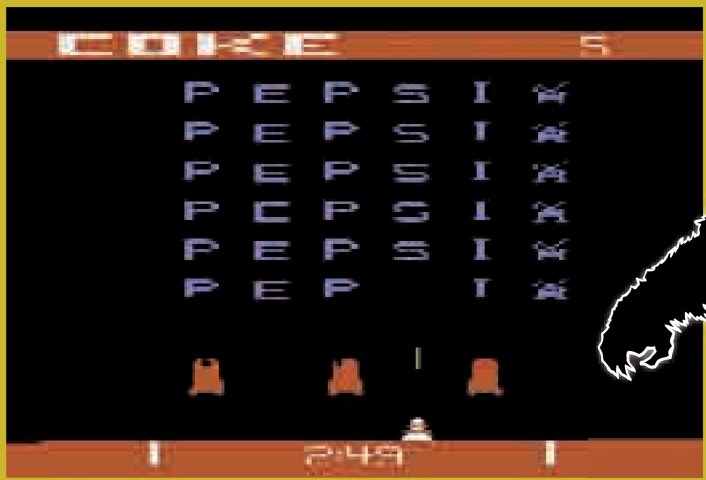
» The popular 2004 '*Space Invaders Deluxe*' hack switched the colour scheme for that of *Part II*, and also used an extra 4K of ROM to add a pretty title screen and improve sound. The double shot was standard, for super-fast action, and even *Part II*'s between-levels animated skits were included.



» This version, *Space Instigators*, goes further, with the correct number of bunkers and an invader formation much closer to that of the original.



Hacking the VCS cart wasn't restricted to homebrew coders, though – Atari itself did it in 1983. A special limited edition version of the game called *Pepsi Invaders* (sometimes erroneously known as 'Coke Wins'), with the invaders replaced by the letters P-E-P-S-I, was officially produced by Atari for employees of the Coca-Cola Company and given away at a sales convention in 1983. However, original author Rick Maurer had left Atari (supposedly partly in protest at the measly $11,000 he was paid) shortly after the release of *Invaders*, and so another coder had to hack the original. Only 125 copies of this version are known to have been made, and it's one of the rarest videogames in existence.



» *Pepsi Invaders* is a three-minute time-attack version of the game, at the end of which you always get the message 'Coke Wins, which is presumably where the title confusion comes from. (To ensure Pepsi never triumphs, the player gets infinite lives.)



1979
SPACE INVADERS PART II (ARCADE)

As obsessed gamers mastered the original, Taito wasted no time in rushing out an arcade sequel. *Space Invaders Part II.* Derived from the full-colour cocktail version (although curiously it simulated the cellophane model, with shots changing colour as they moved up or down the screen), it had no backdrop even on the stand-up version, and a modest collection of new features, both cosmetic (little animated skits at the start and end of each stage) and gameplay-related. There was a new UFO in addition to the classic 'Mystery Ship' – a flashing saucer worth a whopping 500 points (for reference, an entire original wave of invaders nets you just 990) – and both craft drop reinforcements into the invader battalions from Level 3 onwards, filling in any gaps in the top row once per wave. (Pro tip: if you shoot the reinforcements as they drop, they fall to the bottom of the screen and their lifeless bodies serve as auxiliary defence bunkers.) Starting on Level 4, the alien formations also feature 'Splitter' invaders, normal-looking invaders identifiable because they appear in the wrong rows, which divide into two 'Breathers' when shot, who grow larger and smaller in time with the machine's 'heartbeat' sound effects. ('Breathers' appear in their own right from Level 6.)

Score whores were also catered for by a knowing little nod to a bug in the original game, whereby if the last invader left in a level was one from the bottom two rows, it would leave and then erase a trail as it zoomed left and right. In *Space Invaders Part II*, if you managed to trigger this 'bug', you'd net a hefty points bonus (500 or 1,000 points depending on the invader's starting position) and be rewarded with a pretty little 'rainbow' display. And for the first time in an *Invaders* game, if you did net a monster score (now you could display up to 99,990 points rather than the original's absurdly conservative 9,990) you could actually sign your name on the high-score table.

» Most people don't know that the 'rainbow' invader can also be worth 800 points if it started as the bottom invader from the middle column. But now there is proof.





» By the start of the sixth wave, the invaders' starting formation is all over the place.

1980
DELUXE SPACE INVADERS (ARCADE)

This Western variant on *Part II* is the great 'lost' *Space Invaders* game. Never released on a retro compilation (Taito always uses *Part II*, and Midway presumably no longer has the rights) and never converted to a home format at the time, there's no legal way to play *Space Invaders Deluxe* short of owning an original cabinet. The differences between *SID* and *Part II* are largely superficial – the graphics are yellow and green rather than full colour, there's a lunar-city backdrop, the 'Flasher' is worth 200 points instead of 500, and 'Splitters' appear from Level 2 rather than Level 4, but it's a nicer sequel than *Part II* (more atmospheric, harder, and with more balanced scoring) and it's a shame that it's been overlooked for posterity. Incidentally, although it's called '*Deluxe Space Invaders*' on the cabinet, advertising flyers, and so on, for some reason the game has historically been universally referred to as '*Space Invaders Deluxe.*' Weirder still, the game's title screen actually still refers to itself as '*Space Invaders Part II.*'

The Definitive SPACE INVADERS

» When you lose all your lives, your Laser Base is replaced on screen but frozen on the spot and unable to fire, and the game doesn't actually end until the invaders march down to the bottom of the screen and invade you. Thank goodness for the reset button.



1980
SPACE INVADERS (ATARI 400/800)

The third *Invaders* of the Eighties is clearly of the VCS family. The most striking change is the rocket ship on the left-hand side, out of which the attacking invaders emerge in columns of six. After clearing a wave, the rocket ship descends a few pixels, and when it reaches the bottom, there's an odd scene where a flashing red Mystery Ship comes down and carries off your Laser Base – from then on the rocket ship remains at its lowest level till the end.

You get no defence bunkers, but you do have an auto-firing laser, which can take out a column of invaders in a flash – the invaders have one bomb between them, taking the colour of the invader that dropped it. Scoring is weird, with all invaders worth two until they drop a level, after which they're worth four, with the Mystery Ship notching 18 points. There are 12 variations compared to the 112 of its VCS predecessor (bomb speed, number of lives and straight or diagonal bombs), but it's a fascinating twist on the original.

1980
SPACE INVADERS II (ARCADE)

This extremely odd, little-documented US-only Midway release is an even more lost version of *Space Invaders* than *Deluxe*; it's just slightly less great. Only released in cocktail-table format, it's designed as a two-player head-to-head battle (though there is a CPU-opponent option). Each player has their own formation of 33 invaders (each side is assailed by different kinds of invader) which attack as normal, but the object of the game isn't to defeat the invaders, but to score higher than your opponent. The best way of doing that, of course, is to cut a path through the invaders, use it to destroy your opponent's Laser Bases, and then safely rack up the points while he sits there helpless with no lives left. Mystery Ships criss-cross the screen leaving trails of reinforcements in their wake (two complete rows per player, per level, restoring the original's complement of 55 invaders to a wave), and it's a game of relentless fast action which is generally over in a minute or two. Strangely, in versus CPU mode the enemy player has no invaders to worry about, shooting at you from an empty screen, and the game basically becomes a more intense version of normal *Invaders* with an extra source of incoming fire to worry about.



» If you clear a wave of invaders, the next one starts with your Laser Base pushed about an inch higher up the screen, which is a powerful incentive to get on with killing your opponent, not harvesting invaders for points.

1982
SPACE INVADERS (ATARI 5200)

At first glance, *Space Invaders* on the next-generation VCS follow-up, the Atari 5200, looks a lot like a port of the Atari 400/800 computer version (to whose internal hardware the 5200 was largely identical). However, Eighties' Atari wasn't anything like that predictable. Offering 12 variations again, this was another radical remix, which started off by taking away the rocketship and restoring your defence bunkers (of which you got three, as with the VCS game), with the catch that the bunkers no longer got rebuilt at the start of each level. The invaders marched slowly onto the empty screen from the left-hand edge, and at first the game plays much like its immediate predecessor, with the invaders again only permitted a single bomb at a time. After the first two waves, though, things start to get crazy.

Level 3 changes the graphics of all the invaders, and introduces bottom-row invaders which dodge rhythmically from side to side. Level five removes them again, but makes the two middle rows so dark they're almost invisible (bombs are once more the colours of the invader that dropped them, so they can also be near invisible). Level 7 makes all invaders shades of the same colour, and they intermittently change colour and form, including to the very dark, barely visible colours. (Scores for these invaders change with their form, and appear to be variously 10, 15 or 20.) After Level 7 there is yet another flashing red Mystery Ship kidnap, but after this one your bunkers are rebuilt and the invaders go back to their highest point for the beginning of Level 8.

The invaders never change form again after Level 7, but they do get lower each wave and are reset to the high point again after Level 14. Scoring is like the 400/800 version, in that invaders' scores double during the level (this time it's when you've shot half of the invaders in a wave), but scores also double with each change of invader form. So for example, on Level 1 invaders are two and then four points, on Level 3 they're four and eight points, and on Level 5 they're eight and 16 points. (The Mystery Ship gets some of its mystery back, and can be 10, 20, 30 or 60 points, depending on which number of shot you hit it on. It appears much more frequently than in the 800 game, and always in a cycle of once from the left then twice from the right for some reason.)

Working around the limitations imposed by the hardware, the 5200 game is an imaginative and extremely challenging *Invaders*, and a very different experience from any of its predecessors. It's well worth hunting down.

» "Sorry. We got here as quick as we could, but the traffic was shocking."



The Definitive
SPACE INVADERS

» This distinctive circling-invaders formation would go on to make an almost-unchanged reappearance in *SSI91*.



1985
RETURN OF THE INVADERS (ARCADE)

After a frenzy of activity and invention in its first four years, *Space Invaders* took 1984 off to go InterRailing around Europe, and returned afresh to the arcades the following summer, with a release that would signpost the future of the series. Now clearly identifiable as the missing link between the 1979 original and the 1991 sequel that would finally bring the *Invaders* name back to prominence (more on that one later), *Return Of The Invaders* is a garish-looking but subtly honed evolution that frees the invaders from their rigid 90-degree movement patterns and thereby opens up worlds of new possibilities. (Interestingly, apart from the name, the only acknowledgement that *Return Of The Invaders* is part of the *Space Invaders* canon is the appearance of the original invaders on the high-score entry screen.)

Despite the introduction of some basic power-ups dropped when you shoot the Mystery Ship (multiple shots, fireball shots) it's still quite a limited game in itself and it gets very hard, very quickly (although almost uniquely, the arcade board has a dipswitch enabling an invincibility cheat, which turns it into an intriguing battle against invasion). Therefore, its curiosity value holds up rather better today than its gameplay qualities. It's fascinating, though, to observe the elements that Taito decided to carry forward and those it decided to throw away.

» Cutely, your Laser Base now leaves tank tracks along the ground.



1990
SPACE INVADERS FUKKATSU NO HI [TRANS: DAY OF RESURRECTION] (PC ENGINE)

The first sequel to include both 'classic' and remake versions, the port of original *SI* here is almost as terrible as the 1985 NES port, but you also get '*Space Invaders Plus Version*', which is clearly the other parent (along with *Return Of The Invaders*) of *Super Space Invaders 91*. In fact, *Day Of Resurrection* marked a pivotal point in *SI* history because it was the first time since *Deluxe* a decade previously – and the first time ever in a home-format sequel – that Taito had woken up to the iconic value of the original invader designs, bringing them back for the opening waves.

As with the Atari 400/800 game you get no bunkers to protect you from them, although later levels feature indestructible obstacles, which block shots in both directions (the invaders themselves can pass over the obstacles). The Mystery Ship sometimes drops power-ups, including homing shots and a high airbursting missile attack that can wipe out half a wave. While the invaders are restricted to left-right-down manoeuvres again, many other features from later games debuted in *Day Of Resurrection*, including the 'Buster Laser' and 'Time Stop' power-ups, and the ship designs that would be later seen in SSI91. The game rapidly becomes very intense (not least due to the invaders' new 45-degree two-way bombs supplementing their normal fire, assailing you from three directions at once), and your six continues will disappear alarmingly quickly, but you'll come back for more of this fast, exciting update.

» You don't get a version of original *Space Invaders* in *SI90*, though given the state of the PC-Engine one that could be a blessing.



1990
SPACE INVADERS 90 AKA SPACE INVADERS 91 (MEGA DRIVE)

In a messy bit of naming, the Western releases of this sequel came out so much later that the name was changed from the Japanese original title of *Space Invaders 90* to one that would shortly cause considerable confusion with a completely different game. Despite several similarities to *Day Of Resurrection* (pairs-of-levels structure, no bunkers, three-way invader fire), this is a whole new game again with all-new levels, and even though it ran on more advanced hardware it's an uglier one, with some inappropriately jaunty music. It has lots of imaginative features (like an invader that mimics the Mystery Ship's movement along the top of the screen, but if shot, drops to ground level and exerts a tractor beam on you for the rest of the wave, defence bunkers which fall to the ground and block your movement if you shoot them, and stages with craters that affect the angle of your shots), but basically it's the same concept as the PC-Engine game but executed slightly less well.

» Extra special thanks to Luke Wells of Arcade UK (www.arcadeuk.com) for pics and info on *Prize Space Invaders*. Visit Arcade UK for all your arcade-machine needs.



1990
PRIZE SPACE INVADERS (ARCADE)

Around the start of the Nineties there was a brief vogue for 'Skill With Prizes' versions of some classic videogames, where good scores actually won you money (*Prize Space Invaders* had a maximum £20 jackpot, for example). The only two to enjoy anything approaching success were *Tetris* and *Space Invaders* which were released by well-known UK fruit machine company BWB. The games were extremely hard, ramping up the speed and difficulty quickly in order to relieve punters of their cash before they could win a prize (in *PSI* you could only collect your winnings at the end of a wave, and if you decided to play on to win more and died, you lost the lot), but interestingly you could also choose to play just for fun (which cost 30p rather than the 50p for a prize game). Either way, you'd encounter a game based on *Part II*, complete with 'Splitters' and 'Breathers' and reinforcements, but with the addition of invaders requiring multiple hits and a whole bunch of new UFOs that were the main point source. A truly hardcore, collector's item.

1990
SPACE INVADERS (GAME BOY)

The first version of *Space Invaders* for the mono-GB, released only in Japan, is a rotten port with inverted colours (black invaders on a yellow background – ick) and particularly dreadful sound. It wouldn't merit a mention here if it weren't for Versus mode. Played across the GB link cable, Versus mode is basically *Space Invaders II* with a few tweaks (no bunkers, and your opponent's invaders let your shots through), and gives the game some merit if both you and a friend were daft enough to fork out money for it.



» Each player's screen looked like *Space Invaders II* in versus-CPU mode, with the enemy's invaders not visible on your display.

» *Minivader* shows off a meta-vader. (Scrunch your eyes up a bit if you don't know what we're talking about.)



1990
MINIVADER (ARCADE)

Minivader is a really cute little obscurity. It's a test board which was sold – apparently as a legal requirement – with arcade cabinets sold in Japan. It has no sound or scoring, but is a very fast and difficult eight-round *Invaders* game that's alarmingly addictive as you fight to see what the next unique formation will be, and to clear all the levels before the speedy, non-firing invaders get to the bottom of the screen and end the game. The Mystery Ship says 'bomb' when you hit it, for no apparent reason.



1991

SUPER SPACE INVADERS 91 AKA MAJESTIC TWELVE: THE SPACE INVADERS PART IV (ARCADE, MULTIPLE HOME FORMATS)

So, which one of the eight distinct *Space Invaders* games between *Part II* and this was '*Part III*'? Anyway, it's already time to draw Round One to a close (blimey, and there's still 16 years to go) with a watershed moment in the history of *Space Invaders*, in the shape of the game that made videogaming's grandad cool and relevant again. Taito pooled the results of its various experiments and came up with a refined blend that was fast, varied, stylish and exciting, full of classic *Invaders* atmosphere (helped by repeated cameos from the original invaders, and more crucially the return of the original sound effects). Yet it was unmistakeably modern at the same time, with high-quality graphics and sound, power-ups and the first-ever *Space Invaders* bosses. *Super Space Invaders 91* even managed to get away with breaking some of the most cardinal *SI* rules – some stages have invaders breaking formation and diving to attack the player *Galaxian* style, and for the first time being invaded no longer ends the game (it just costs you one life, with the remaining invaders reset to their starting positions).

The Western and Japanese versions of the game are significantly different. *Majestic Twelve*, the Japan release, divides the game's 43 stages into groups, with a branching structure akin to *OutRun* so that you don't have to play them all to get to the end – in fact, you only have to beat about 15 stages to see the end sequence of *MJ12*, whereas with the Western SSI91 release to have to clear all 43 one after the other. The game can also be set to allow two players simultaneously, or have players alternate in the traditional 1979 *Space Invaders* style.

Both games share one mystery, though, and it's not the Mystery Ship. The advertising flyers for both versions depict and mention a second type of bonus stage in addition to the 'Cattle Mutilation' rounds, taking place against a time limit, with a boss partially obscured by columns which you (presumably) fly through. Supposedly, hitting the columns cost you time, and beating the boss before the limit added the remaining time to your score as points. This section, however, doesn't appear anywhere in either version of the finished coin-op – you can play all the way through to the end, even without losing a life, and you never get a 3D boss battle. Evidently it was pulled from the game at the last minute, and the proper 'Director's Cut' version of SSI91 has been lost to videogaming history forever. Or has it? Tune in next month, chums.

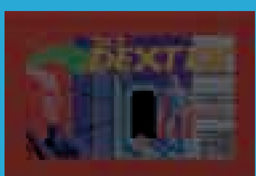
» Here's a detail of the *SSI91* flyer, showing the supposed 3D bonus section. If only we could play it, eh?



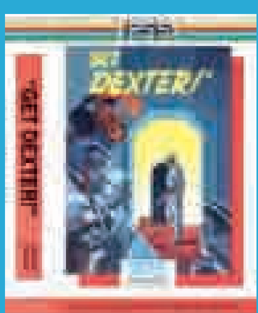
GET DEXTER

Get Dexter – two words guaranteed to slap a smile onto the face of any CPC owner. Remi Herbulot's gentle fusion of sci-fi, platform puzzles and feng shui was a marvel when it was released over 20 years ago. Like all good science-fiction yarns and counterfeit Rolexes, it is truly timeless

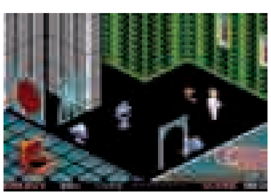
IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ERE
- » **DEVELOPER:** REMI HERBULOT
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+







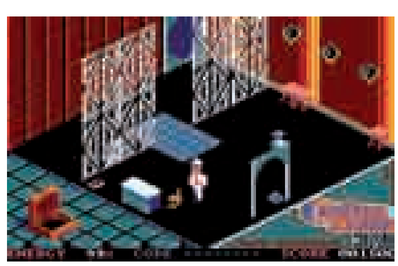
» Don't turn your back on them Dexter, they can still kill you.

It's fair to say that thanks to Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond, the isometric platform genre pretty much ruled the Amstrad roost during its heyday. Who could forget a *Batman* game that had the caped crusader hopping around collecting Bat Mobile parts like a superhero special of *Scrapheap Challenge*? And many will fondly remember playing through the pair's most infamous creation *Head Over Heels*, with its intuitive tagging system, striking cartoon visuals and puppy-dog gameplay. But there exists another game, which might have slipped off your radar. Maybe because it wasn't written by the aforementioned isometric Einsteins, or perhaps due to its unassuming box art. But like all mild-mannered superheroes, this game would become legendary in CPC circles by two very different monikers: *Get Dexter* and *Crafton & Xunk*.

It was the official English release for the game that was entitled *Get Dexter*, but confusingly, your mission was to actually *prevent* Dexter from being 'got'. An android with a penchant for dangerous missions, Dexter learns that his kind is facing impending extinction and he's been enlisted to save his colony, XUL 3, from an escalating war that is approaching ominously on the horizon. To succeed in his quest, Dexter must infiltrate a well-defended base and access a super-computer using a numerical code – but before doing so he must first obtain



» They look friendly, but if that pair touch you, they'll drain your energy quicker than you can say, "where's my energy?"



» Scooter was unaware that Dexter, enraged with never getting any help, was going to stab him in the back with a wrench.



» This is one of the most frustrating puzzles in the game. In fact, Darran couldn't get past it and started weeping like a big baby.

"BEING WRITTEN IN THE AMSTRAD'S FABLED MODE 0 MEANT A COLOSSAL 16 COLOURS COULD BE USED ON SCREEN AT ONCE"



» When all of Dexter's energy gets zapped he turns into the Incredible Hulk, but sadly always dies of exhaustion before you can make use of his gamma powers.



» These elaborate-looking green pads will fire Dexter into the air, handy for reaching inaccessible doors, watering the plants, or simply taking a breather from being chased.

each part from eight professors who are dotted throughout the game.

Now, while its premise might sound a little complex, after a few seconds of playing this immediately engrossing game, you soon come to realise that *Get Dexter's* artificial tongue is securely coiled inside his chrome cheek. Dexter is (how can we put this) kind of how the Tin Man might have looked had he ditched the heart idea and begged the Wizard of Oz for a skin graft instead. Dressed like a crossing-guard balancing a funnel on his head, he waddles at quite a pace around his isometric sandbox, emitting just enough personality to make you concerned for his welfare as you guide him through the many wonderfully perplexing rooms that the game dishes up.

Behind many a great game character there often sits a willing, iconic, funny or annoying sidekick. Sonic had Tails, Mario had Luigi, the Master Chief has Cortana, and our man Dexter, well, not to imply barrel-scraping here, is paired up with a foot with a head on it. Known as Scooter, this sporadic sidekick jaunts around our hero like an excitable puppy, impervious to harm from the game's enemies. Looking past his odd exterior, Scooter does serve a vital purpose in the game; he can be brought to heel using a whistle, allowing Dexter to hop onto his head and access hard-to-reach areas, and while his bounding often proves irritating – especially when you're smothered in enemies – it's usually to single-out objects and areas of interest that will help Dexter in his adventure.

A puzzle aspect is fused into every facet of *Get Dexter*. It might look like a typical 'find the red keycard to open the corresponding red door' adventure but it's actually a lot deeper than that. Disposing of enemies isn't a case of finding precariously placed ammo, or spell casting with a quick slap of the blue Enter button. Scattered across every screen are objects, which can be picked up and used. These include wine bottles, canisters, magnets and futuristic gadgetry galore. Each enemy is only susceptible to attacks from certain objects, and as your stringent inventory briefcase will only carry one item at a time, progression requires a degree of trial and error, and a balance of disposal and advance. Accompanying the useful items is furniture which can be manipulated, moved and stacked, giving Dexter access to high ledges and allowing him to reach further objects and progress in the game.

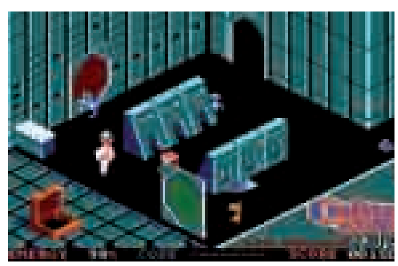
Colourful assortments of enemies litter the screens, ranging from small droids and punks with green mohicans to stressed-out, blonde lab-workers. Mimicking Death in *Gauntlet*, they will all home in on Dexter the second he sets a pixelated foot onto their screen and proceed to drain all his energy at a touch. The elusive number-crunching professors that Dexter must locate won't attack but will immediately ring the alarm the second they catch sight of our hero, causing a glut of robotic creatures and radiators to storm the room, poised to take him out like a Pokémon SWAT team. How you actually extract the vital ciphers from the doddering scientists proves a puzzle in itself. We're not about to leak how you do it, as that would be pilfering a huge chunk of enjoyment from those who have yet to experience it.

Graphically, *Get Dexter* pushed the CPC to unsurpassed domains. Being written in the Amstrad's fabled Mode 0 meant a colossal 16 colours could be used on screen at once. While today 16 colours wouldn't even cover a bullet casing in *Gears Of War*, for its time, performance-pushing on the CPC would often cause games to be sluggish, take months to load, and look like they should be labelled with a mental health warning. Thankfully, *Get Dexter* proved that it could be possible for 16 colours and one gameplay to share an Amstrad harmoniously.

Get Dexter feels as unsullied now as it did back when it was helping shake the scales of the 8-bit computer rivalry, and if you've yet to discover its multi-hued charms, we urge you to go and get Dexter no really, go get him.



» Jumping around is great for avoiding enemies and nothing to do with the fact that the jump and screenshot buttons are the same…



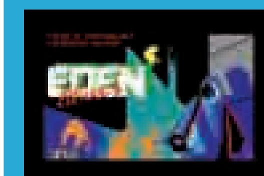
» *Get Dexter*. One of the finest looking Amstrad games around.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

INTERCEPTEUR COBALT AKA MISSION DELTS
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1984

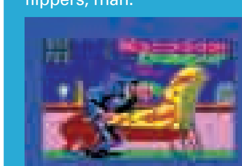
MACADAM BUMPER AKA PINBALL WIZARD
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1985

EDEN BLUES
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1987



A FRENCH MASTER CLASS

Developed by ERE – one of the very first French software developers – *Get Dexter* was the first European game to ever receive the coveted Masterclass award in *Amstrad Action*, garnering an impressive 94 per cent from the magazine. ERE's first international hit, however, was the pinball sim, *Macadam Bumper*, also created by Remi Herbulot. It boasted a cool feature allowing pinball wizards to create their very own table – handy, as the game only had one measly slab to play on. Funnily enough, the game's loading screen features one of those annoying cucumber-heads from *Get Dexter*, although quite why he's bent over the table in that manner, engrossing himself with the cabinet's artwork is anyone's guess. Pay attention to your damn flippers, man.

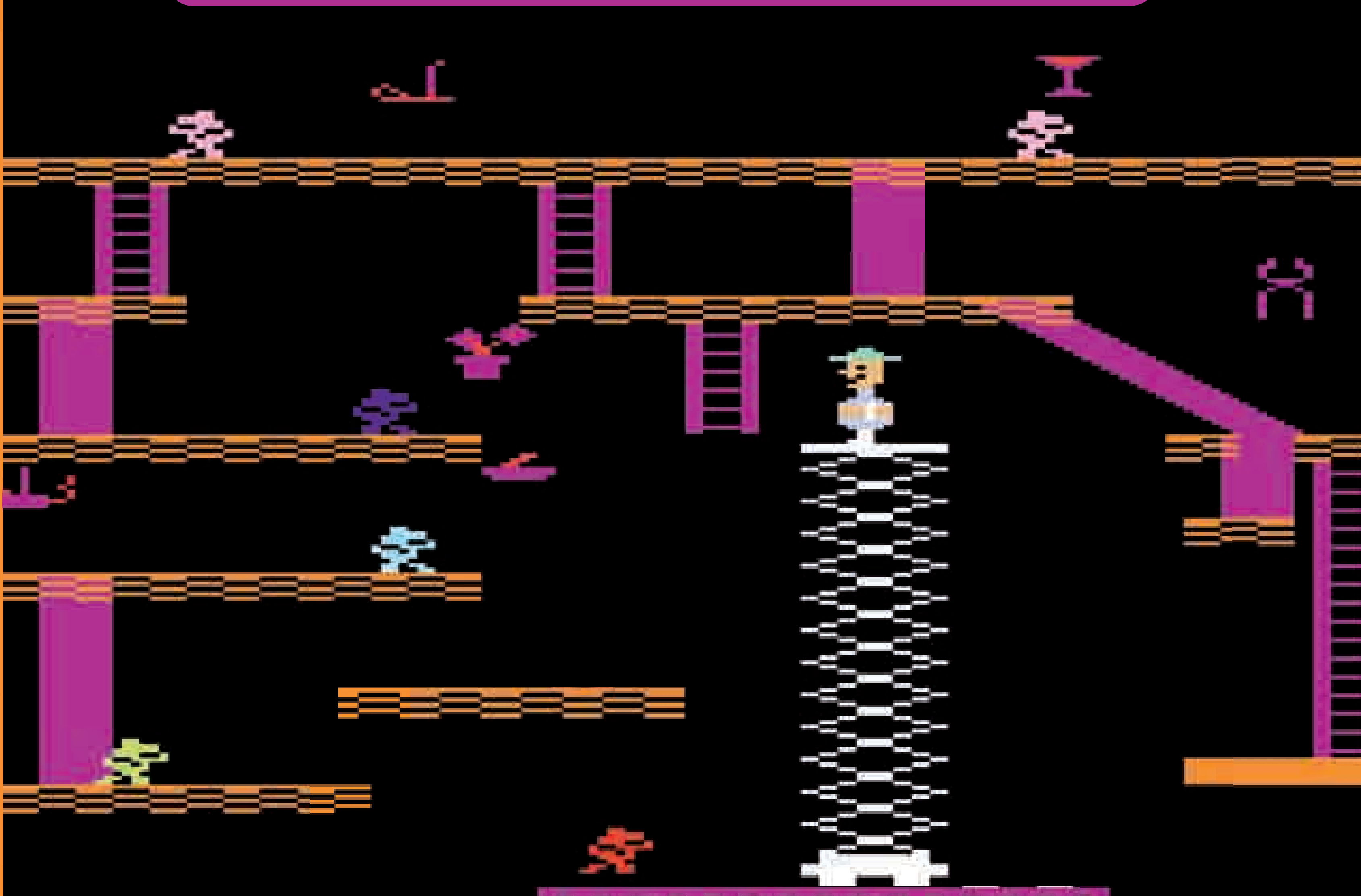


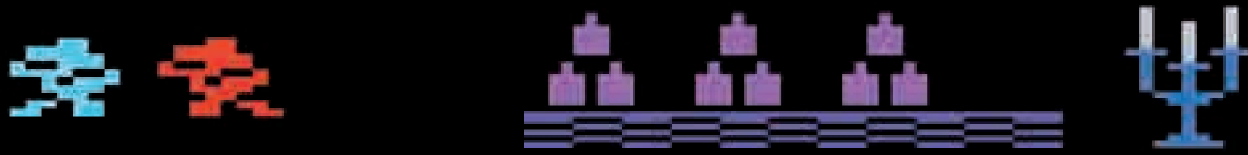
» *Macadam Bumper* was another release from ERE in 1985.

THE MAKING OF...

MINER 2049er

Sitting snugly between Pitfall! and Manic Miner in the platform-game timeline, Miner 2049er is something of a forgotten classic. With the recent mobile remake thrusting the game back into the spotlight, Craig Grannell talks arcade games, colour and sound with Bill Hogue, the original game's creator…



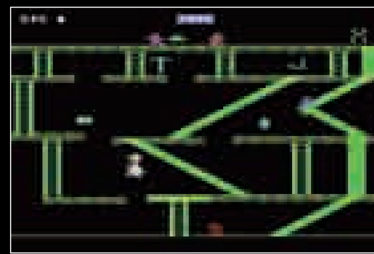




» [Atari 2600] Bob originally wanted to be a dinosaur hunter. He was gutted when he discovered they were all extinct.



» [Atari 2600] "How am I supposed to get up there?" moaned Bob, before spotting the TNT and cannon.



» [Atari 800] "It's tough being me," thought Bob, "but at least my hat matches this mine's colour scheme.

From talking to Bill Hogue, it's very clear that he was once an avid gamer and devourer of new technology. He recalls working at a Radio Shack in Reseda, California, which received one of the first TRS-80 computers. "Between serving customers, I learned how to program in BASIC and machine code," he begins. "One night, the store's alarm system went off, due to a loose wire, and they called me in to wait for the alarm company to repair it. The police were also called, and they had guns drawn on me while I was playing on the computer, waiting for the alarm company." From Bill's initial dabbling in programming while working at Radio Shack, Big Five Software was born, initially releasing acclaimed games for the TRS-80. When Bill had tired of the restrictions of the Tandy machine, it was the Atari 400/800 that beckoned, predominantly because of its graphics and sound capabilities.

Bill's first creation on Atari's then cutting-edge hardware became a classic of its era, and, in hindsight, something of a genre-defining game. Although David Crane's *Pitfall!* is typically cited as the first home-console platform game, *Miner 2049er* is one of the earliest examples akin to subsequent platform games in any meaningful sense (such as *Chuckie Egg* and *Manic Miner*, through to the likes of *Impossible Mission* and beyond). Unlike many of its contemporaries though, *Miner 2049er* doesn't solely task the player with collecting items and avoiding nasties on each of its ten levels – Bounty Bob has to walk over every piece of ground to complete a level. The conceit – added after much of the gameplay was completed – is that Bob is on a mission to inspect every inch of each of the mines, in search of the malevolent Yukon Yohan. However, rather than adding this element to increase the game's challenge, Bill reckons it was "more to do with *Pac-Man* than anything else", although he adds, "I was never very good at *Pac-Man*, so I'm not sure why I borrowed any elements from the game."

Elsewhere, it's clear that gameplay elements from other arcade games seeped into the mix, although, as Bill explains, at the time this was nothing new for him: "All of my early TRS-80 games were very similar to the arcade games that Jeff Konyu [Big Five Software's TRS-80 graphic artist] and I used to pump quarters into at our various hangouts. *Miner 2049er* was the result of wanting to blend together fun elements from many different arcade games we loved to play." Bill notes that there are ideas in the game somewhat based on *Donkey Kong* – "especially the climbing aspect" – and that *Pac-Man's* influence extended past exploring every piece of each level: in *Pac-Man*, ghosts become vulnerable after a power pill is consumed. Similarly, *Miner 2049er* enables Bob to dispose of the otherwise deadly radioactive mutants roaming around each level, after grabbing one of the various items found in the mine (presumably left behind by careless or very dead past miners).

Like many games at the time, *Miner 2049er* was put together quickly. "I believe we had the gameplay sorted first, and then worked later to figure out what it was we had invented", laughs Bill. "We decided that perhaps our hero was stuck in a mine and – for reasons I cannot remember – he was a member of the Mounties in Canada. Actually, I wonder if that had something to do with a bar at the Disneyland Hotel that Jeff and I used to frequent – it had a definite Canadian wilderness feel to it…"

Keen to create something unique for home consoles, Bill also took another cue from *Donkey Kong*, adding exclusive features to each level. In contrast to

"I DON'T THINK THE ATARI LIMITED ME IN ANY WAY. REMEMBER THAT I WAS A 'BLACK-AND-WHITE GAME WITHOUT SOUND' KIND OF GUY, COMING FROM THE TRS-80 WORLD, AND SO THE ATARI OPENED UP A LOT OF POSSIBILITIES" BILL HOGUE



» [Atari 800] Hey, kids, always pay attention to signs; otherwise, like Bob, you might fall to your death, after stuffing a cannon with too much TNT.

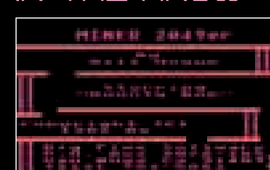
PORTABLE PROSPECTOR

Although most identified with early-Eighties home computers and consoles, *Miner 2049er* entered the embryonic mobile gaming world via two distinctly different products. The most instantly recognisable as a version of Hogue's original game is Mindscape's Game Boy conversion, released in the early-Nineties. Bill notes, sadly, that this version "was a really poor sales performer", perhaps due to the original's impact waning significantly by the Nineties. Over a decade passed before the release of Magmic's mobile version, while any DS or PSP *Miner 2049er* remains an unlikely prospect.

That said, stranger things have happened, and the Tiger Electronics's *Miner 2049er* LCD game is certainly one of those things. Based on the final level of the original game, Tiger's version tasks you with using TNT to fire Bob to high platforms, enabling him to grab 'prizes.' Surprisingly evocative of the original, Bill notes that he "didn't have any connection to it, other than signing my name on the licence agreement", adding, "it was nice for its time, of course, when the toy industry was cranking those things out." Clearly, they didn't crank out too many, because the unit is now very rare, although you can sample its delights via Pete Schlepphorst's Windows-based simulator (http://webpages.charter.net/ps4/m2049lcd/index.htm).



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** BIG FIVE SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** BIG FIVE SOFTWARE

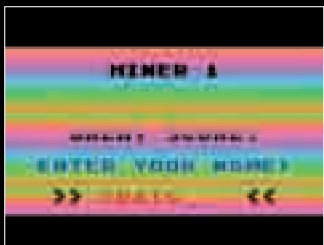
» **PLATFORM:** 9 ATARI 400/800; LATER CONVERTED TO APPLE II, ATARI 2600, ATARI 5200, C64, COLECOVISION, IBM PC, TI-99, THOMSON MO5, TRS-80 (UNRELEASED), VIC-20, AND OTHERS.

» **RELEASED:** 1982 (ATARI 400/800)

» **GENRE:** PLATFORM

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

THE MAKING OF…
MINER 2049er

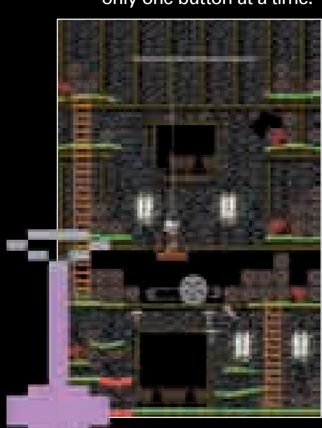


» [Atari 800] Bill's subtle use of colour is particularly apparent on the high-score-entry screen.

MOBILE MINER

Converting retro games to mobile is a balancing act, as Wes Tam discovered when working on Magmic's *Miner 2049er mobile* update (www.bountybob.com). "It was clear we had to modernise the game, and we debated which gameplay mechanisms would be preserved, and what new features to add", begins Wes. New levels and contemporary graphics, along with a refined control system, brought the modern version up to date, but what of its retro sibling? "We considered a retro theme for our game or recreating the original", says Wes. "In the end, we wanted to stay true to the original fans and also reach out to a new generation of gamers – the 'classic' and 'modern' modes enable us to meet this requirement."

With no source code available, the original game was recreated from scratch by playing it – "By the end, the project's designers could pretty much play the game blindfolded", jokes Wes – and getting Bill involved, thereby ensuring the game stayed true to the original. There were changes though, as Wes explains: "Scrolling was one of those compromises – some builds had the entire map on screen, but the characters were too small. Also, many phones have issues with simultaneous key presses, so we revisited how the controls work. Now, the game is playable with one hand, using only one button at a time."





» [Atari 800] "Monty Mole had it easy," thought Bob, about to run the gauntlet of a row of four suitably named 'pulverisers.'



» [Atari 800] "What a careless place to leave a huge vat of radioactive waste," thought Bob, shortly before falling into it.

many other platform games of that era, where you pretty much see everything the game has to offer features-wise in the first couple of screens, *Miner 2049er* introduces slides, transporters, lifts, deadly 'pulverisers' and, in Level 10, a chunky cannon, which, via the use of TNT, fires Bob into the air, so he can reach higher platforms. "I did try to space out the 'special equipment', so that each level would be a new and different challenge", explains Bill. "If you just look at the first level, you have no idea that there are slides, transporters, lifts, and even a cannon that you will have to contend with later. Each item was programmed separately, too, so that each screen has its own special look and feel." Of course, many of these elements make an already tough game even tougher, but Bill is unrepentant about *Miner 2049er's* sometimes-extreme difficulty. "At least you don't have to keep a stack of coins on the monitor, to assure your place in line for the next game, like Jeff and I used to do in the arcade," he jokes, noting that for particularly frustrated parties there is a built-in 'cheat code' phone number that lets you start at any level. "We actually included that as a printed instruction sheet in later releases", he adds.

Perhaps surprisingly, Bill notes that he doesn't find the game any easier himself, claiming that he's "always been terrible" at the games he's created. Luckily, *Miner 2049er's* challenge from a technical perspective didn't stump him, despite it being his first colour game, and nor did he feel limited by the hardware. "I don't think the Atari limited me in any way," he confirms. "Remember that I was a 'black-and-white game without sound' kind of guy, coming from the TRS-80 world, and so the Atari opened up a lot of possibilities." Bill ran with both graphics and sound, turning *Miner 2049er* into an extremely colourful experience, infusing Bob with plenty of character. "Well, *Miner* was my first colour game and so I think I wanted to make use of every last coloured pixel I could find," recalls Bill. "The high-score screen, where the multi-coloured 'fives' are doing a chaser-border dance around the screen, is probably the best example of my overuse of colour. It took a lot of effort to use display-list interrupts to dynamically change the colour between scan lines to achieve so many different colours on the screen at the same time." As for Bob, he's made up from three Atari players – a blue one for the clothing, an orange one for the flesh tones, and a white one for arms and legs. Various tricks are then used for other graphical effects, as Bill explains: "When Bob explodes, the size registers are being rapidly changed from 'X1' to 'X2' to 'X4'; and the glow effect of the radioactive creatures is created by cycling the colour registers from dark to light and back again." From a musical standpoint, Bill is less happy with his work: "I really hate the music – not the sound choice, but the implementation. Music wasn't my thing, and I really struggled to get the music to be even halfway decent. For the sequel, *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*, I made the smart choice and had another programmer do the music."

Despite the niggle factor of *Miner 2049er's* audio, Bill clearly loves the game, and in something of a two-finger salute (well, one finger – Bill is American, after all) to the draconian policy followed by

> "MINER WAS MY FIRST COLOUR GAME, SO I WANTED TO USE EVERY COLOURED PIXEL I COULD FIND" BILL HOGUE

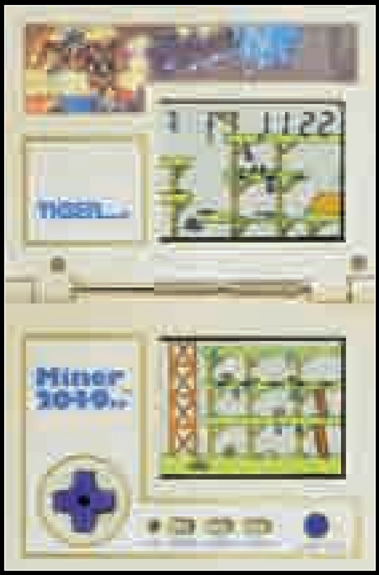


» [Atari 800] Having fun on the hydraulic platform, Bob wondered why the mines weren't all equipped with such aids.



» [VIC 20] Bob's joy at reaching Level 2 was short lived: those weren't waterslides, but slides of deathly peril and doom.

"I'VE HAD PEOPLE WRITE TO ME TO SAY THAT THEIR KIDS ARE NOW PLAYING MINER 2049ER" BILL HOGUE



» [LCD] Watch a demo of LCD *Miner 2049er* and check the time – that's progress, Eighties style.

much of the gaming industry regarding downloading old games, he made *Miner 2049er* freely available via the internet. However, rather than just releasing the original game's ROM, he created a standalone *Miner 2049er/Bounty Bob Strikes Back* emulator for Windows. "I made the emulator because some of the general-purpose emulators I'd seen required you to spend time looking for Atari ROMs," explains Bill. "There were also issues that annoyed me, such as flickering colours – I'd spent so much time back in the Eighties tweaking those colour registers to achieve perfection and I wanted to see the game that way again." To ensure the output was faithful, Bill had to emulate each of the Atari's features he'd used in the game. Handily, none of the Atari's ROM functions were used originally, and so the emulator doesn't need an Atari ROM. However, the code had to include the amount of time things would have taken on a real Atari, so all of the original game's timing tricks would work. "The hardest part was probably finding all of the old Atari technical manuals and re-learning all the nuances of the Atari custom chips," says Bill. "Even some of the copy protection stumped me for a while – in the Eighties, I coded things 'cryptically', in an attempt to confuse anyone disassembling the program. Ironically, I turned out to be one of those people."

Bill also got the chance to revisit his classic game when Magmic came calling, wanting to update the game for the mobile market (see 'Mobile Miner'). Believing the game to be a worthy prospect – due to its simple, addictive gameplay – Magmic wanted the 'classic' version of *Miner 2049er* to be as close to Bill's original as possible on a mobile phone. "They did a fantastic job – it's beyond cool to see the classic *Miner 2049er* game on a cell phone," enthuses Bill. "Magmic has also discussed taking *Miner 2049er* on to 'future platforms', and I'd love to see that happen – I think it would be fun to see *Miner 2049er*'s various pieces of special equipment re-imagined in a 3D universe."

For the moment though, Bill has his sights set on other things. Now working at Technicolor, writing real-time code that controls film printers, he regularly travels around the world to the company's various labs. "I've been to Rome so many times now, I feel comfortable driving without maps," he reveals. Neither does he have anything to do with the games industry any more, although he does note that he's still sort of in the entertainment business. That said, although gaming is firmly in Bill's past, he still thinks fondly about his games, and especially *Miner 2049er.* "I have received so many wonderful letters from people who have told me that my games were a major influence on how they got into the computing business – and that really is an honour. I've also had people write to me to say that their kids are now playing *Miner 2049er*, which is similarly remarkable," says Bill. "Equally amazing are the prices that some of my cartridges fetch on eBay – *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* for the 5200 seems to be the most rare of all. I should have made and kept a lot more of those."

Bill's best *Miner 2049er* memory of all though, involves the time when graphic artist Curtis Mikolyski and he were invited to go to New York to receive an award. "I remember how we both had tuxedos on and went to some fancy party afterwards – it was the kind of evening you imagine the winners at the Oscars having," he recalls. "Later that night, we showed up at the airport for the trip home, only to find out the flight was cancelled and that we had to spend five hours in an airport – still wearing our tuxedos."

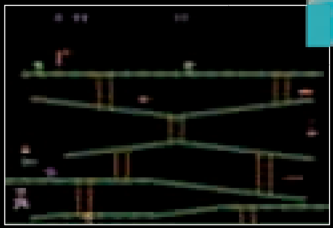
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER NOVA
SYSTEMS: TRS-80
YEAR: 1980

ROBOT ATTACK
SYSTEMS: TRS-80
YEAR: 1981

BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK
(PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 400/800, ATARI 5200, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985





» [C64] Jumping for joy because he was appearing on the C64, Bob was unaware of the approaching foe…



» [Atari 2600] Bob had already managed 16 star jumps. Only another 942 to go and he'd have a brand new record.

MONSTERS

PLATFORMS AND LADDERS, BUT NO GORILLAS



- **PUBLISHER:** ACORNSOFT GAMES
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** BBC MICRO
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

HISTORY

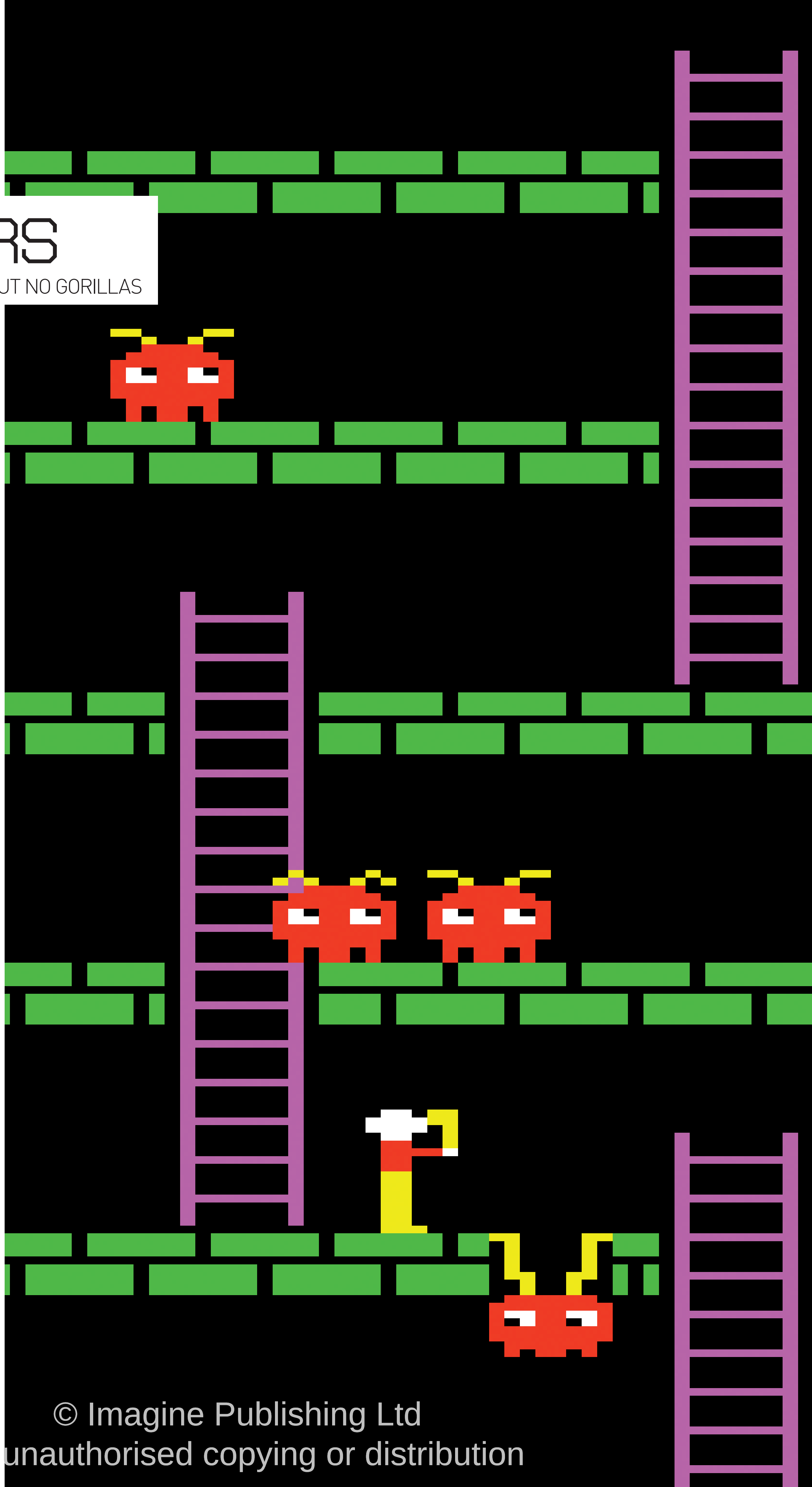


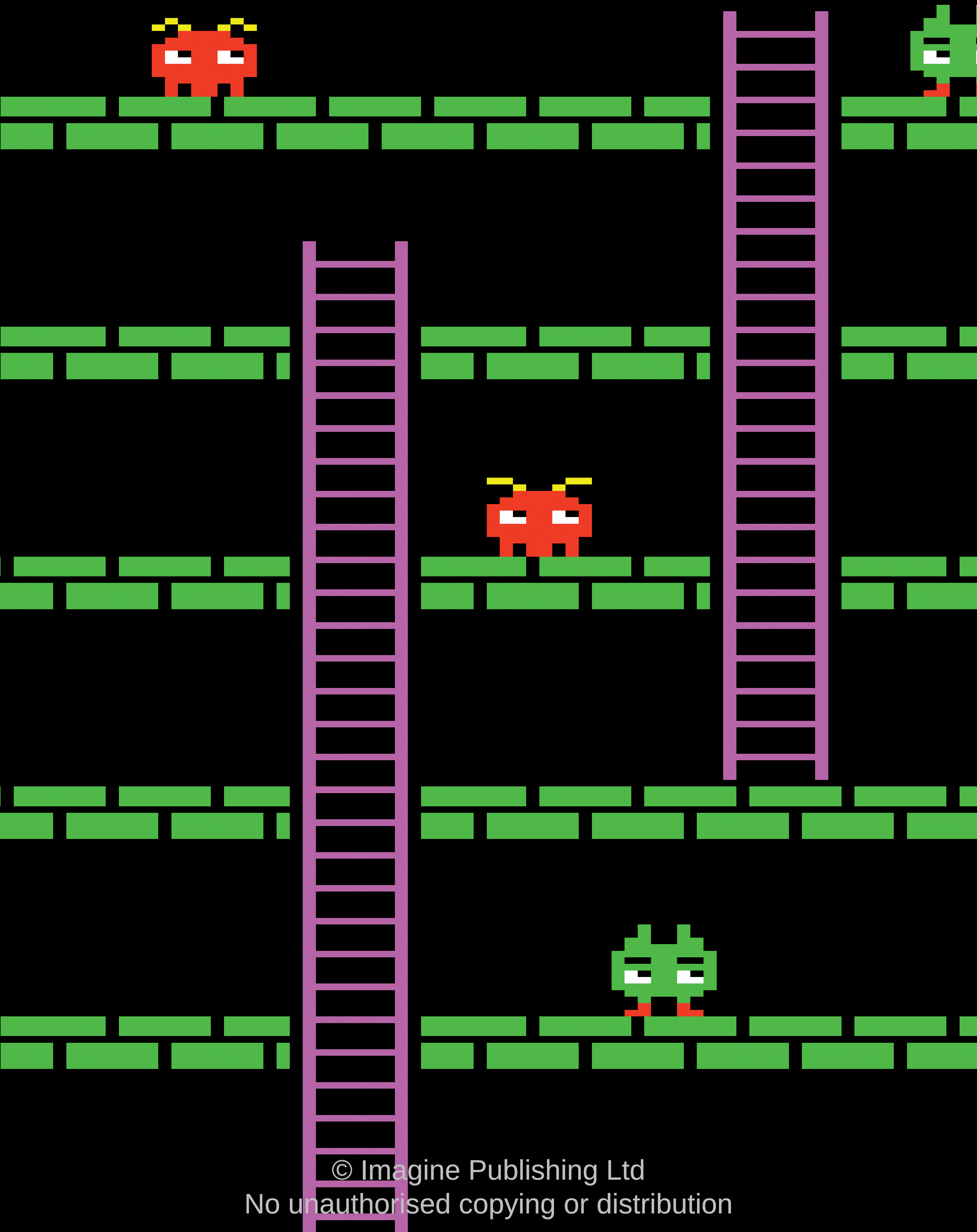
Once upon a time, before lawsuits and copyright infringement became common practice, if a good videogame came along, coders would simply copy it for themselves. *Space Invaders, Donkey Kong, Pong, Asteroids* and *Pac-Man* were just a few of the games that quickly began popping up on various home computers and consoles like the BBC and Atari 2600. While some of them were complete bobbins, others were very, very good indeed.

Acornsoft Games' *Monsters* is a great example of the latter, and to this day it remains an excellent and challenging platformer that continually drags you back for 'one more go.' Essentially a rip-off of Universal's *Space Panic* (quite possibly gaming's first single-screen platformer) *Monsters* has you running up and down a series of ladders, while desperately trying to avoid the aliens that are constantly chasing you.

Amazingly, while you're armed with a shovel that could probably do a hefty amount of damage to the alien's bonces if you were to hit them with it, it's actually used for a far more mundane purpose. Basically you dig holes, and it's these newly formed pits that allow you to trap the alien menace. Once a xenophobe is captured, you need to quickly re-fill the hole and send him back to that great mothership in the sky. Take too long however, and the pesky little tyke will dig himself out, turn green and become even trickier to destroy. Oh, and did we mention that you've got to kill all your enemies before the timer runs out?

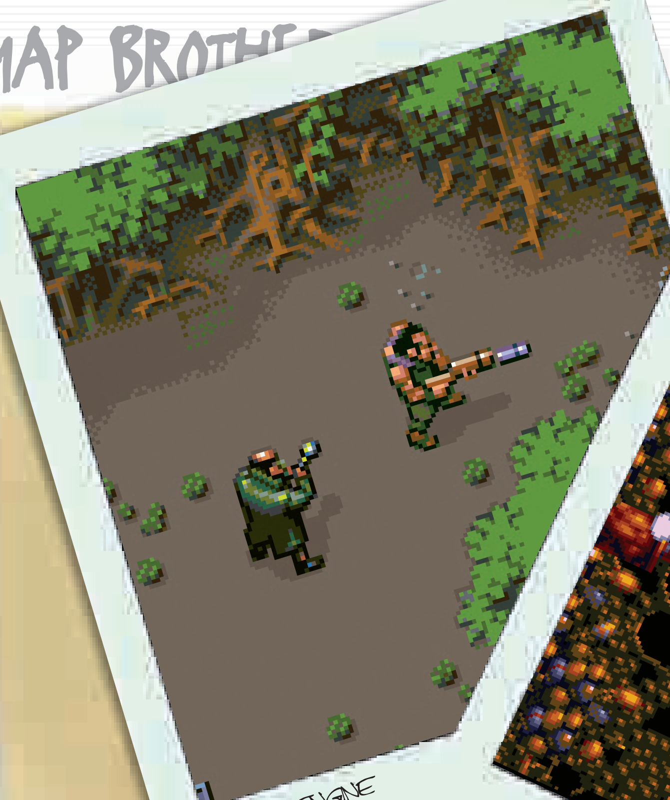
While *Monsters* looks like it's been constructed from a set of Lego bricks, there's no denying that it's an incredibly faithful conversion of the original arcade game. Yes the main character lacks definition, and the constant sound of his running footsteps is enough to drive you insane, but if it's straightforward fun that you're after, then *Monsters* never disappoints. Now, if only we could see a brand new update of the original classic on Xbox Live Arcade.



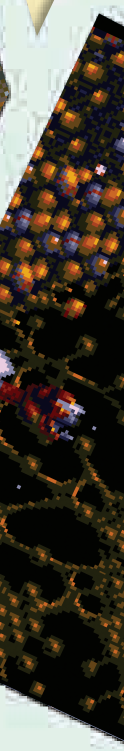




ONE OF THE ORIGINAL PROMO PICS OF THE BITMAPS TO ENSNARE THE MEDIA'S ATTENTION. ERIC MATTHEWS LOOKS KIND OF LIKE SUGGS, EH?



CHAOS ENGINE HAD ALL THE HALLMARKS OF THE BITMAPS



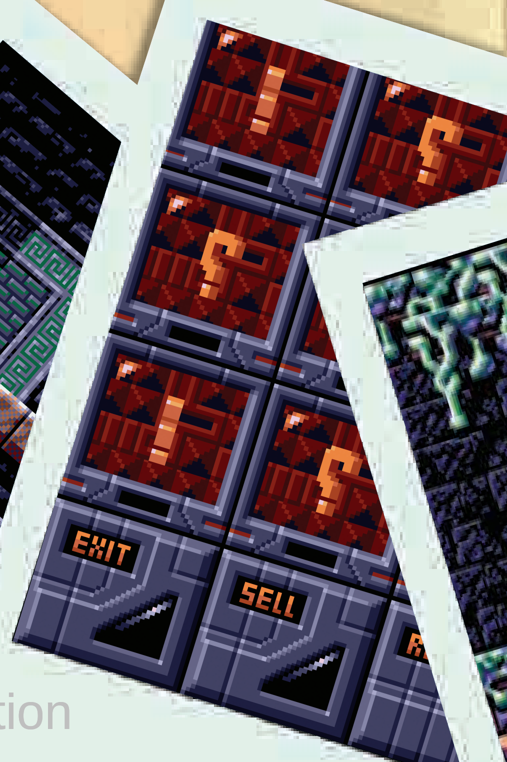
COMPANY PROFILE – THE BITMAP BROTHERS







GODS (AMIGA) MIXED PLATFORMING AND ACTION TO GREAT EFFECT.



BITMAPPED BRILLIANCE

There's a reason the Amiga's operating system was called Workbench, but until 1987, there'd never been any craftsmen in position to create the works of technical majesty that the amazing computer was capable of. The industry was keeping such artisans out of sight, hidden beneath the workbench, unnamed and unknown. Then came the Bitmap Brothers to set the programmer free; brothers to all who laboured at the bench, and subordinate to no publisher. The rock stars of the programming world had risen…



» The Bitmap Brothers may have been founded 20 years ago, but its games are still going strong – just look at the all-new *Speedball 2*!

If history has proven anything, it's that the subjugated will rise, the oppressed will push back and the little people aren't so little when their strength is marshalled. Not to suggest Steve Kelly, Eric Matthews and Mike Montgomery are little, of course, but certainly they suffered under the harsh regime of a publisher-run software industry for many a long year before becoming the standard bearers for a new age of game developer recognition.

LOVE TRIANGLE

But these uprisings take planning, and the seeds of rebellion must be planted by a few brave souls willing to challenge the status quo. In the case of the Bitmap Brothers, it was a prophetic triangle of professional collaboration that brought the future renegades together and made them more than just working acquaintances.

Before board game conversion obsessed Leisure Genius was bought out by Virgin Games, it employed one Mike Montgomery as its marketing director. At the time, the Spectrum was a reigning contender for the 8-bit crown and Leisure Genius was eager to complete its digital board game catalogue by including Scrabble; previously licensed and published by Sinclair Research itself. The game had been written by Steve Kelly of Psion Publishing (a beloved bed partner of Sinclair Research), and he paid several visits to Leisure Genius to help with the game's re-release.

Both men had also worked with a third programmer, Eric Matthews, in 1986 on a cross-corporate project to convert Kelly's Sinclair QL beat-'em-up, *QL Karate*, to the Amiga and Atari ST. Despite receiving decent reviews, the promotion of the game was severely limited; a matter that served only to compound the rising disenchantment that had been building – quite independently – in the three coders for several years. It didn't take long before they became friends as well as colleagues, and their thoughts on the direction of the computer-game industry began to mingle.

It quickly became apparent that Mike, Steve and Eric shared a common notion. Each felt it thoroughly inequitable how the computer and videogame industry was entirely publisher orientated. When gamers bought the latest titles, it was the publisher's name that was brandished brazenly on the box art, with the development company receiving second billing (often in the case of a footnote on the back of the inlay), while programmers went completely unacknowledged, as Mike Montgomery explains.

"At the time, the publishers got all the credit. You didn't go to a shop to buy an Apple record; you went to buy a record by the Beatles! When you bought a film, your decision wasn't based on the distributor, so why would people buy games that way? In many respects, it was a case of bad promotion since the publisher's label didn't really reflect the kind of content a gamer could expect. We wanted to change all that."

It became the founding goal of their new partnership to rectify the way a game was delivered to the public, and the Bitmap Brothers became the first game developer to not only recognise its creative teams, but to actively promote them. This extra dimension of freedom and public tribute would result in some of the finest and most critically acclaimed 16-bit games ever seen, but even a creative powerhouse armed with a barrow full of vision had to face exactly the same challenges of any new business under an overfed Tory regime.

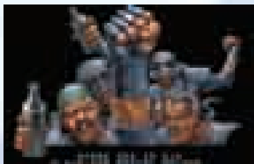
IN BRIEF

There are many reasons we'll remember the Bitmap Brothers and why its name will always carry weight with gamers, but the real reason the industry will ensure Bitmap retains its position on the highest pedestal is its promotion of the programmer as the driving force behind great games.

The BITMAP BROTHERS

FINEST HOUR

While it might usually be possible to mark a company's crowning achievement, the nature and purpose of the Bitmap Brothers makes this something of a dichotomy. While *Speedball 2* is ultimately the game most synonymous with Bitmap's achievements, the sheer enormity and latent commerciality of *Z* really shouldn't be overlooked.



THE BITMAP BROTHERS



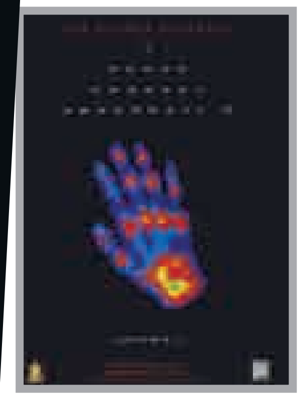
» There was a special edition of *Z* called *Z Platinum*. It comes in a big black box containing two CD-ROM (*Z* and the 'Directors Cut'-Demo), a mouse pad, a pin, a key chain and a cool black T-shirt (Size XL).



» The loading screen from the leaked Atari ST version of *Xenon*. We think *Xenon*'s a much better name, although an unrelated shoot-'em-up later appeared called… *Kelly X*!



» Artwork (including the awesome box) for *Gods* was commissioned from renowned comic artist Simon Bisley.



» A stylish, if cryptic, advert for Bitmap's first games compilation. Lots of style, just the way the Brothers liked it.

BUILDING THE BITMAP

The trio's founding philosophy of energetically promoting the developers required a careful choice of name. The natural inclination to begin their reign as rock star developers was to choose a cryptic, masculine name that wouldn't look out of place in the thriving acid-house music charts of the time. But the lad's keen understanding of the necessity of intelligent media exposure kept them from succumbing to superficial indulgences, choosing instead a relevant, iconographic and enduring designation.

"Bitmap" was a well known computing phrase of the late-Eighties which carried with it the strong graphical connotations the team intended (and succeeded in) infusing its games with, while the term "Brothers" cleverly suggested the collaborative, dynastic structure the company was born into; waving a flag of defiance at the stifling industry it was breaking away from while embracing its creative brethren. The simple fact that the name Bitmap Brothers trips lightly off the tongue 20 years later and still carries with it an imposing subtext of gaming excellence is testament to the importance of a well chosen name.

Leaving their respective companies in 1987, the soon-to-be Brothers moved cautiously toward the development of their next generation games. Working from home, each team member set themselves a goal and kept in touch with the rest of the team by way of an occasional phone call and, more specifically, at a weekly meeting in a London pub (followed by a lashed-up trip to the arcades), where progress would be updated and new goals set. A workable, if slightly disjointed method of operation, but certainly one of the only ways a start-up business in such a volatile, fickle industry could possibly begin.

It wasn't until after the team's first game was finished that they decided productivity would be best served with company premises, and a studio in Wapping, East London, was established. The Bitmap team was confident in its launch product, but had yet to realise its founding principle of placing a well-promoted programming face alongside any game releases, in order to get the company's image off on the right path and immediately establish the profound public visage it knew would be vital to future titles. All this cost money and, for almost a year, there was none coming in.

"Getting an office was great and speeded up the whole process of writing games, but money is always at the top of the problem list," says Mike, recalling the embryonic days of the company he still owns and operates. "At first, this meant working for months without pay, and then when you start employing people you have to pay them out of your own pocket. It takes a lot of effort to get a game off the ground before you can get a publisher to fund it, and when you're a new entity it's even harder to get the money men on your side."

"So one of the first things we did was to employ a PR person to promote us as a development team. We had some great photo shots made, which worked really well as all the magazines loved the style and were desperate to use them. All the hype surrounding us was carefully planned," Montgomery explains.

Indeed, the magazines of the day didn't really know what to make of this new and high-profile developer. And yet they didn't care; easy-to-acquire coverage of programmers wearing cool dude shades, in dramatic black-and-white photos and posing as if for an album cover looked great in the pages of a magazine, making the Bitmap Brothers a valuable media commodity before any games had even been released.

Naturally, all this hype demanded a game that was equal to the modish countenance the three hackers were portraying, and when it arrived in at the start of 1988, the magazines were reassured that their journalistic sponsorship had been justified.

> "THE BITMAP BROTHERS BECAME THE FIRST GAME DEVELOPER TO NOT ONLY RECOGNISE ITS CREATIVE TEAMS, BUT TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE THEM"

PROGRAMMER AND PROUD

Originally titled *Kelly X* (which was changed to *Xenon* after an Atari ST beta



» A pixel-perfect version of *Speedball 2* was released (under Mike's watchful eye) for the Pocket PC. The elongated screen suits the game perfectly, and is well worth a visit.

SPEEDBALL 2

Although it's now the most valuable of the Bitmap Brothers' IPs, *Speedball* got off to a shaky start. After a commissioned concept for a tennis game was rejected, the Brothers hit the pub, as Mike recalls:

"We went down the pub to drown our sorrows, but we all felt the concept could really go somewhere with a few changes. The only paper we had at the time was a cigarette packet, which we sketched out the concept of *Speedball* on. We took it to a publisher who signed it there and then."

It wasn't until the sequel to this massively popular game that the concept's possibilities were really unlocked. *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* has been the Bitmaps' most prolific title, being converted to no less than 13 different formats, and with a revamped Xbox Live Arcade version and the all new PC remake imminent, the franchise shows no signs of ever slowing down.

"This time, *Speedball 2* is an international project from the beginning, and it will bring back fond memories to all *Speedball* fans and have an online element that could never have been done all those years ago," Mike told us. We can't wait!





» The wicked acid-house musician Tim Simenon (AKA Bomb the Bass) lent his talents and tunes to *Xenon 2*, helping to create something of a landmark in Amiga history.

preview was rumoured to have leaked from Mastertronic), the Bitmap Brothers' first game was a complete critical and commercial success.

In many respects, *Xenon* was a typical shoot-'em-up, but so many of the standard fare elements of the genre had been tweaked that it was hard to find the right pigeon hole for it. Rather than the established, linear scrolling and forced direction normally associated with shooters, *Xenon* allowed for a free-roaming existence. Alternating between a ship and a tank helped infuse a pseudo 3D depth to the birds-eye-view game; punters loved it, while magazines touted it as the "first home coin-op" (*Computer And Video Games* #77, March 1988).

In truth, time has been harsh to *Xenon*, and it takes a sincere refresher course in early Amiga history to remember the significant, and justified, impact the game had. *Xenon* demonstrated the true arcade gaming capabilities of the wonderful 16-bit machine and also the significance of the still new and overlooked Amiga market. It was also the first Amiga game to make it into the all-format top 40 charts.

The smooth scrolling, awesome sound and fast gameplay fooled more than a few reviewers of the day into thinking this was a coin-op conversion. *The Games Machine* (in April '88) gave *Xenon* an impressive 88% while reporting it as publisher Melbourne House's second successful port from the Amiga-based Arcadia coin-op boards. In fact, the Arcadia coin-op version was a port of the Amiga home game; a testament to just how refined and influential the Bitmap Brothers' debut title was, even if time has tamed it for the modern gamer. Mike Montgomery even had a recent run-in with his game's arcade counterpart when out one night. "*Xenon* was converted to coin-op very early on and was really successful. A few years ago I actually found one in a pub. It was great playing it in front of my drinking pals all those years later," he laughs.

The 12 months of tenuous, difficult and financially straining development paid off almost overnight, and the devilishly well-played media game ensured the Bitmap Brothers received the accolade and recognition it had set out to achieve.

As with all successes, the major obstacle immediately faced is bettering such a high-profile accomplishment, and the media (and, indeed, the gamers), had instantaneously astronomical expectations of this new developer.

A publisher had already asked to see a design for a tennis game, which the Bitmaps researched and developed while working on *Xenon*. When it came to presenting the game design, however, the publisher had changed its mind and brought the Brothers' second – and fully funded – development to a complete halt. A few hours drowning sorrows down the pub changed their minds on abandoning the significant amount of research so quickly and, with the help of renowned graphic artist Mark Coleman, they redeveloped the idea into a futuristic sports simulation called *Speedball*.

One thing the Bitmap Brothers could never be accused of is repetition, since the release of each game saw it take on another genre and win, and yet the publicity machine was always running full pelt. Despite being a futuristic sports game, the second title to come from the Brothers (released in late 1988) was consistently compared to *Xenon*, which, in all fairness, verges on the ludicrous. The two games couldn't have been more different, and yet the developer had woven so many subtle (and not-so-subtle) nuances throughout both games to the point at which they did indeed cross over, making comparisons bizarrely reasonable.

The slick metallic sheen, beautifully refined graphics and liquid-smooth scrolling became the signatures of a Bitmap game, with no other developer coming close to achieving such a recognisable cult status during the entire life of the 16-bit generation of machines. But there was one area where the Bitmap team hadn't reached its full potential, and it was a gap it fully acknowledged and intended to bridge in its next game, as Steve Kelly told *ST Format magazine* shortly after the release of *Speedball*.

"Just solving the problems that occur [while] writing a game makes it all worthwhile. For instance, we set ourselves the goal of making *Speedball* faster than *Xenon*, producing big images on the screen while still ensuring the program runs smoothly. We have some of the best graphics artists around. At the moment we feel we cannot improve dramatically on our graphics or programming, but we need to concentrate on the weakest element – sound."

HIP HOP ON PRECINCT 13

In 1989, the Brothers had reached full swing and was planning for a future designed by its own team of artists, prophesied by its programming oracles and, after its next game, remembered by the song of its own techno-sirens.

A sequel to the debut game was planned by the Bitmaps, then passed to one of the few development teams who'd shown a similar talent for the smooth scrolling and attention to detail that had become synonymous with the Brothers; The Assembly Line. *Xenon 2: Megablast* was a sequel in name only, adopting a more established shoot-'em-up style (automated, single-direction vertical scrolling, although the direction can be reversed a short space) alongside the trademark Bitmap Brothers visuals.

If it was possible to ignore the eye-blisteringly vivid, stunningly Giger-esque graphics, playing *Megablast* with the sound turned down would yield a pretty average twitch shooter experience. Of course, it's utterly impossible to ignore that incredible imagery, and the sound changed the way people listened to their home computers forever.

Teaming up with record label Rhythm King – who shared a distinctly similar philosophy when it came to artist recognition – one of its most successful bands was drafted in to help recreate a recent chart hit of the same name as the Bitmap's new

Z

While *Speedball 2* has sold more units across many, many platforms, Bitmap's real-time strategy game *Z* is its best seller on a single machine.

More than four years in the making (explaining the apparent absence of the Bitmap Brothers after *The Chaos Engine* projects), Mike explains the enormity of the undertaking.

"While we were in the process of writing it, CD-ROM began to take over as the format of choice for PC so we had to change lots of things, and go back through to add lots of cut-scenes. It was almost like starting the project all over again when we were halfway through. It took so long to write and cost so much to develop, but it was worth it as it sold the most of all our games."

One of the first RTS games to demonstrate the importance of a carefully balanced AI and a simple learning curve, this is one of the great under-appreciated titles of the last decade.



ONE OF THE FOUNDING BROTHERS OF BITMAP, MIKE MONTGOMERY STILL LOOKS AFTER THE COMPANY'S PRS, INCLUDING THE NEW SPEEDBALL 2 GAME.



STEVE KELLY AND ERIC MATTHEWS AT THE BITMAP BROTHERS STAND AT A GERMAN COMPUTER FAIR IN 1989.



THE BITMAP BROTHERS



» The Bitmaps publishing label, Renegade, was a joint venture with Rhythm King Records.

AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

Equally difficult to place, even the lesser Bitmap games were infused with such detail and enthusiasm they overshadowed the competition without effort. Perhaps, then, we should mark down *Magic Pockets* for its rather vulgar Saturday morning prostitution on *Going Live!*



sequel. Bomb the Bass's Tim Simenon worked with Eric Matthews and computer musician David Whittaker to recreate the acid-house classic on the Amiga.

The result was one of the finest and most revered recreations of a genuine chart hit ever heard on a home computer, with a near perfect rendition of Bomb the Bass's *Megablast* playing during the title screen. A reduced, yet recognisable and invigorating version provided background music during gameplay.

With the one gap in the Bitmap Brothers' arsenal now filled, the reviews of *Xenon 2: Megablast* were resoundingly congratulatory. Yet this partnership between the music and games industries was to have far further reaching repercussions than impressively high review scores. It would lead to a partnership that would reinvent the Bitmap Brothers into the kind of leading powerhouse capable of fully realising the industry changes that the founders had strived for since the beginning.

THE RENEGADES

Although the Bitmaps had entered into multiple game deals with Mirrorsoft (who released several Bitmap games under its Image Works label), the publisher had always acknowledged that a team like the Bitmaps wouldn't remain confined to one distribution network for long. When the head of Rhythm King Records, Martin Heath (an avid gamer who'd jumped at the chance to get involved with *Xenon 2*), met Eric Matthews, he learned a great deal about the state of the industry and fully identified with the Bitmaps' vision of setting the programmer free.

In 1990, they joined forces and founded Renegade Software to publish the Bitmap Brothers' games and also accept new material from other independent developers with the promise of placing the programmer and development teams at the fore of any promotion. In an interview with *ST Format*, Heath revealed all about his concept and what he thought of the software industry as a whole.

"It became apparent when I first met Eric that he wasn't too pleased with his publisher. Programmers are being treated as if they're idiots. I met some publishers, and most of the people running these companies are businessmen with nothing else to do but use their ability to make money. They're sympathetic to the programmers, but the decisions they make are often faulty. It was decided, as with Rhythm King Records, that the artists should get their just reward." Another like-minded visionary who was out to change the games world then, and for a while, they certainly did.

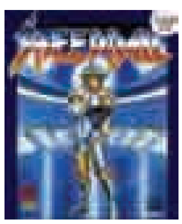
THE GAMES OF BITMAP



XENON

» The debut game from the Bitmaps that paved the way for a new age in gaming. Switching between a top-down racer and standard fare shoot-'em-up, *Xenon* went down a storm with punters and critics alike.

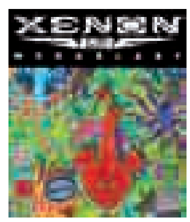




SPEEDBALL

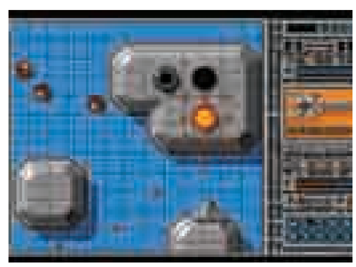
» To think this was almost a girly tennis simulator. *Speedball* combined football with *Rollerball* and reminded gamers that playing by the rules was actually a lot less fun than injuring opponents and bribing officials.

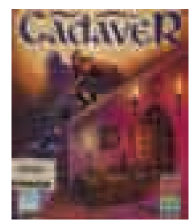




XENON 2: MEGABLAST

» Packed with so much detail it could make your eyes bleed, it's difficult to know what the best aspect of this rather gorgeous sequel is: the outstanding graphics or the incredible acid house soundtrack..

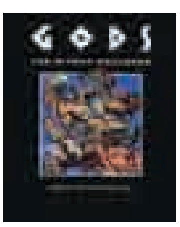




CADAVER

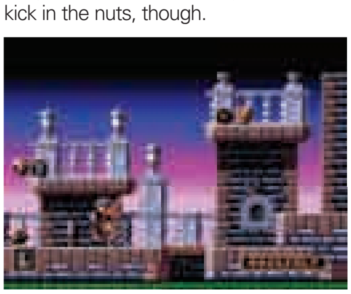
» Isometric games used to be a lot more fun than they are now, but still *Cadaver* holds its own with fans of the adventure genre; plundering depths of interaction that few, if any, 16-bit iso-explorers were able to manage.

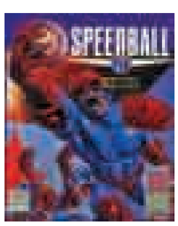




GODS

» Although Hercules seems a little impotent in this platformer incarnation, the dazzlingly clean graphics make *Gods* a very welcome addition to the genre. The fact that there's no music (which, after *Megablast*, is almost unforgivable) is a kick in the nuts, though.





SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

» For many, *Brutal Deluxe* is the pinnacle of not just the Bitmap Brothers catalogue, but computer and videogaming in general. A much larger pitch, twice the violence and triple the thrills, *Speedball 2* is the best game made by anyone ever.





MAGIC POCKETS

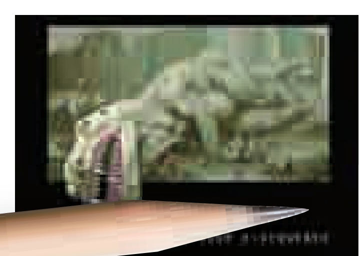
» Featuring the musical "talents" of Betty Boo (*Doin' The Do* – sheesh), this good looking platform game was robbed of credibility when it was featured as a phone-in game ("Up! No, I mean down! Err… left!") on *Going Live!* How the mighty fall.





THE CHAOS ENGINE

» Getting right back on track, *The Chaos Engine* was a welcome return to Bitmap greatness. Featuring two-player, top-down *Ikari Warriors*-style action, the rich storyline and extravagant characters helped create a tough but genuine classic.





» *The Chaos Engine* characters oozed charisma, although the US version had the Preacher changed to a scientist in order to avoid any controversy.

"THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND GAMES LED TO THE BITMAP BROTHERS' REINVENTION"

The Bitmaps' own game, *Gods*, was the first title released under the Renegade label, soon followed by other classics such as *Sensible Soccer* (from industry legend Jon Hare, who now part owns Tower Studios with Mike Montgomery), *Fire & Ice*, *The Chaos Engine* and *Z*, to name but a few. Renegade continued to publish and promote developers until 1995 when it was bought out by Warner Interactive. Warner continued to use the label until 1997 when it was sold off to GT Interactive, and the Renegade name was regrettably discontinued.

EXTENDED FAMILY

After years of generating successful and original intellectual property, the Bitmap Brothers team has unquestionably achieved its goal. The name is still synonymous with the highest quality of computer and videogames, and despite restructuring and alternative use of the name, the Bitmap Brothers is still under the watchful eye of Mike Montgomery, and the wealth of creative material at its disposal continues to be put to good use.

The most prominent talk about the Bitmap team is the forthcoming re-imagining of *Speedball 2* for the PC, though Mike has intimated we can expect more from the Brothers team that has provided gamers with such remarkable and unforgettable titles for two decades.

"I still run the Bitmap Brothers, but with a much smaller team looking at various formats for my IPs. *Speedball 2* for Xbox Live Arcade was done together with John Phillips and Mark Coleman, both long-time Bitmaps, and we have more games in the pipeline. Watch this space!"

MEGABLAST

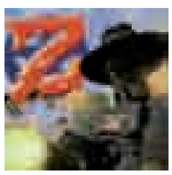
A testament to the dedication of the Bitmaps was their willingness and ability to uncover the chinks in the company's own armour, and when it was time for a sequel to their debut game, the lads knew the music had to be exemplary. To that end, they sought out the help of professional electronic musician Tim Simenon of Bomb the Bass (this writer's favourite band of all time, incidentally). His recent chart hit *Megablast* (from the awesome *Into The Dragon* album) was the perfect accompaniment to the space-based shooter, although the musician was no stranger to computer music after he'd used a C64 as a sequencer for Bomb the Bass's outstanding debut number one acid house hit, *Beat 'Dis*. While the tenuous Betty Boo connection to *Magic Pockets* wasn't quite the follow-up gamers or house music fans were looking for, the fact remains that Bomb the Bass and the Amiga are now connected for ever more.





THE CHAOS ENGINE 2

» Requiring something of a souped-up Amiga, *The Chaos Engine 2* filled in a few blanks from the original, by splitting the screen horizontally to allow more freedom for the two players and bolstering up the graphics as well as the action. Nice.



Z

» Over four years in the making, *Z* features a war between red and blue robots. Not only a perfect introduction to RTS (due to the ease of adoption), *Z* also appealed massively to fans of the genre with its intricate strategy and well-balanced AI.

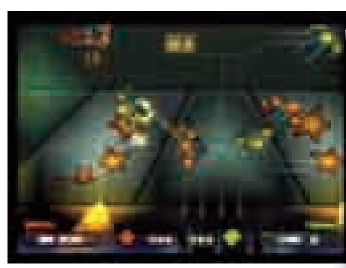


SPEEDBALL 2100

» An unfortunate part of the *Speedball* lineage, an attempt was made to make the franchise 3D on the popular PlayStation console, but the lack of speed and coarse graphics robbed this awesome game of its beauty.









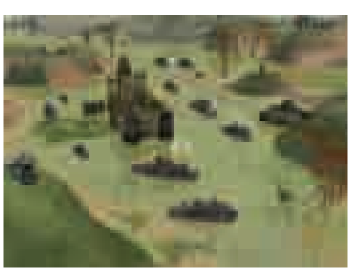
Z2: STEEL SOLDIERS

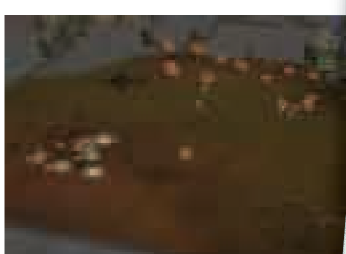
» A 3D sequel to the original RTS, *Steel Soldiers* is not without its fans, although its unfortunate arrival between hardware generations leaves it a little lacking. Still available and very playable, it's certainly a collector's item and well worth a couple of hours.



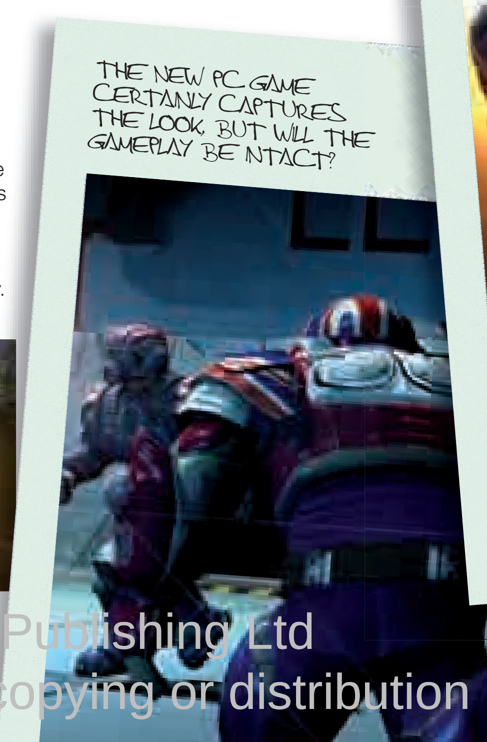
WORLD WAR II: FRONTLINE COMMAND

» This tactical war simulator featuring the events of D-Day proves how much the Brothers team learnt during its previous jaunts into the third dimension. Some beautiful environments adorn the game, though, without any Bitmap trademarks. Well received, if a little dry.









THE MAKING OF...

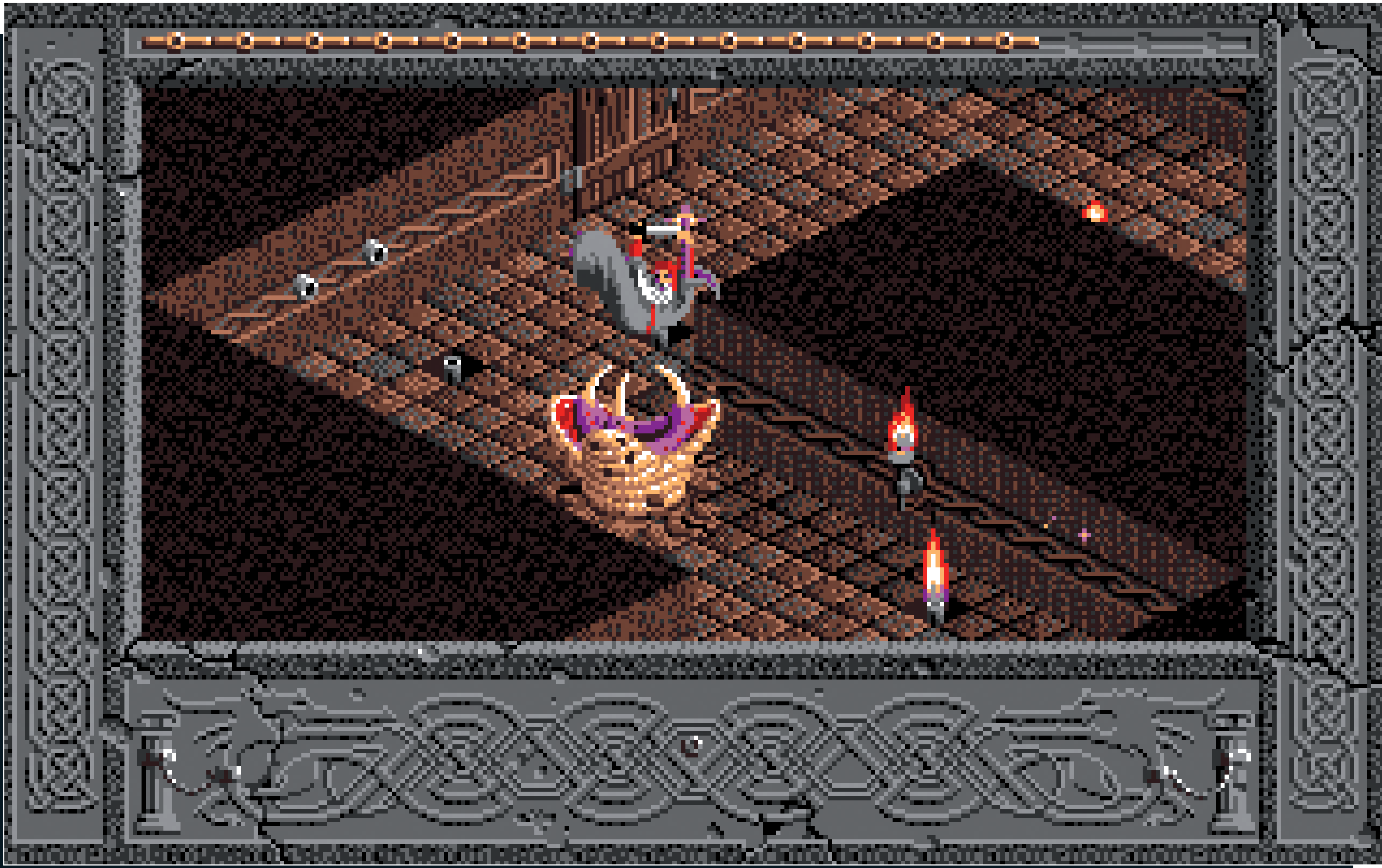
THE IMMORTAL



Here at **Retro Gamer** we've always considered it a delicious irony that the main character in *The Immortal* meets a sticky end in a variety of particularly gruesome ways. Damien McFerran caught up with creator Will Harvey and thanks to the Dust of Compliance, convinced him to spill the beans on this underrated action adventure

Ever done something on the spur of the moment and found yourself in a tight squeeze as a result? Will Harvey certainly has. Back in his high school days he studied computer programming and when the teacher enquired if anyone in the class knew about Assembly language, Harvey keenly thrust his hand skywards despite the exact opposite being true. The youngster was perturbed to discover that this moment of irrational impulsiveness had resulted in him receiving the dubious honour of putting together a class presentation about the aforementioned programming language the following day. "I learned a lot about Assembly that night, I can tell you." chuckles Harvey today, older and thankfully much wiser. However, this one, fleeting moment of barefaced dishonesty had fateful repercussions and ultimately set him on the road to videogame stardom.

Having unwittingly exposed himself to the questionable joys of Assembly programming, Harvey discovered that



» One wrong step and you're worm food. Oof!

"SEGA WERE FINE WITH THE DEATH ANIMATIONS, BUT NINTENDO WEREN'T. THEY MADE US GET RID OF THE BLOOD" WILL HARVEY

he had become curiously hooked and therefore continued to expand his knowledge long after the infamous class presentation had been and gone. "At 15 I wrote a game called *Lancaster* for the Apple II" he vividly recalls. This rather basic *Space Invaders* clone was completed in 1982, and it was the need for musical accompaniment that led effortlessly onto Harvey's next project: "I required music for *Lancaster*, so in 1984 I wrote *Music Construction Set*." This proved to be his breakthrough release – a glorious mixture of entertainment and education, which allowed users to learn the basics of musical notation. Astonishingly, Harvey was a tender 15 years of age when he began work on this sizable hit. Electronic Arts subsequently picked it up for publication and quickly ported the game to other popular platforms of the era. In keeping with its early promotional campaigns (which focused heavily on the normally camera-shy guys responsible for the incredible games they were publishing) EA decided to showcase the fresh-faced Harvey as a 'star programmer'. The shy youth soon discovered that he was becoming something of a video-gaming icon.

Despite his newfound fame, Harvey refused to rest on his laurels and proceeded to gain numerous qualifications at Stanford University (including a PhD in Computer Science) while simultaneously furthering his programming career. He founded his own company – Sandcastle Entertainment – and released *Zany Golf* in 1988 for the Apple IIGS. Once again, heaps of critical acclaim followed and Electronic Arts eventually ported the light-hearted isometric golf sim to several formats, including the fledgling Sega Mega Drive/Genesis in 1990. It was around this time that Harvey began to brainstorm the concept of a fantasy role-playing title, but with a twist that would have been tremendously unique for the time. "I wanted to make an online graphical adventure," he remembers. This was a tall order and a bold move, when you consider the fact that the internet was still very much in its infancy back in the early-Nineties, nevertheless Will Harvey persevered with his grandiose plan.

Assembling a crack team of artists and programmers – which included Brett G. Durrett, Michael Marcantel and Ian Gooding, Harvey set about crafting what would eventually evolve into a wholly unprecedented fantasy epic. The project was initially christened 'Campaign', which gives an indication of where Harvey was headed with his original vision. "Initially it was playable with others over a modem, which was very cool." The idea involved each player selecting a different fantasy role (Elf, Warrior, Wizard and so on) and setting off into the uncharted wilderness of the World Wide Web for fame and fortune. The name was later changed to *The Immortal* and Harvey discovered that as he and his team tinkered with the project, it began to shake off its



» Although they initially appear to be hostile, later on the goblins come to your aid.



» When was the last time you saw a hole covered in creepy spider webs and thought, "I think I'll venture inside"?

IN THE KNOW

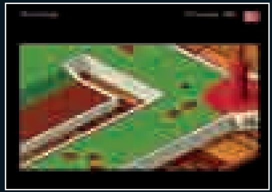


» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **DEVELOPER:** SANDCASTLE
» **RELEASED:** 1990 (APPLE IIGS)
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ZANY GOLF
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988

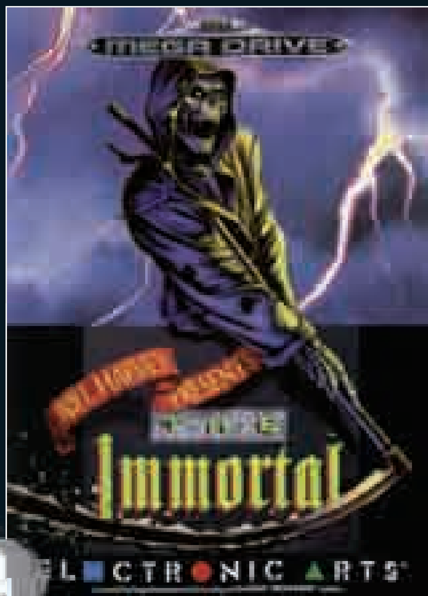
MUSIC CONSTRUCTION SET
SYSTEM: APPLE II
YEAR: 1984



THE IMMORTAL



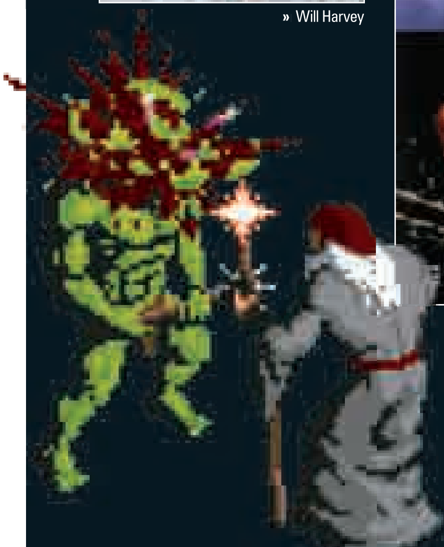
» Will Harvey



» The Mega Drive version featured some lush artwork, which no doubt helped shift a few copies.



» The barrel was great. Just be sure to avoid whirlpools.



online aspirations. "Over time the focus became the storyline instead of the online plan," he comments. Eventually the team realised that if they were to incorporate an arresting plot, the online multiplayer would have to be sacrificed entirely. The focus was duly altered and as a result *The Immortal* became a resolutely single-player adventure.

The game made its debut on the Apple IIGS in 1990 (it turned out to be one of EA's last major releases for the system) but when it became obvious that Harvey and his team at Sandcastle had crafted a truly unique role-playing experience, *The Immortal* was ported to the Amiga, Atari ST, IBM PC, Mega Drive and even the lowly 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).

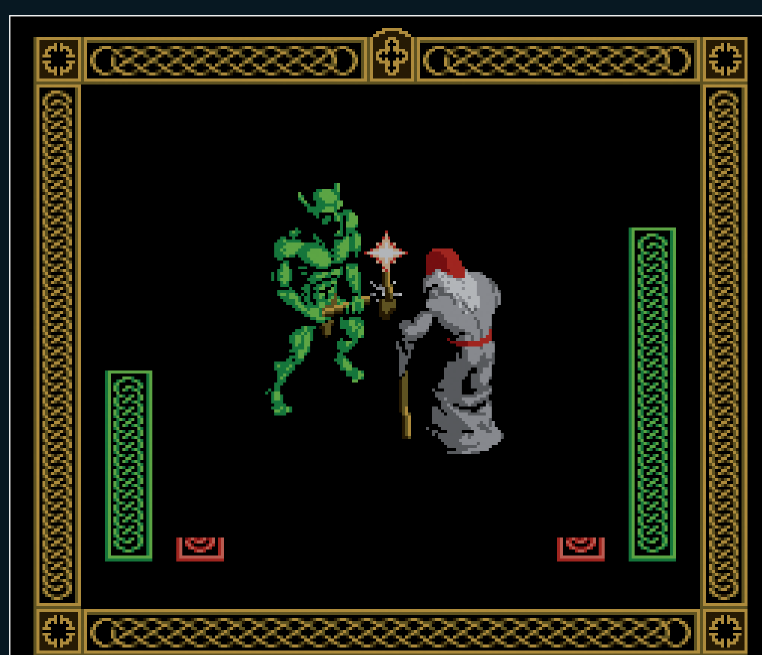
It's very easy to pigeonhole Harvey's game as 'just another role-playing adventure', but in reality it's actually more of a curiously compulsive mixture of real-time action and 'point-and-click' exploration. Viewed from an isometric viewpoint, the action takes place in the dank subterranean ruins beneath the ancient city of Erinoch. The player assumes the role of an apprentice wizard desperately searching for his master Mordamir, who has absent-mindedly got himself lost within the ominously titled 'Labyrinth of Eternity'. Along the way there are numerous encounters with shady denizens of the deep, including goblins, trolls, giant worms, spiders and finally a massive, fire-breathing dragon.

Harvey didn't want his new game to blend into the crowd and nurtured definite ideas regarding the kind of experience he wanted to create. Rather than follow the clichéd route of pitting good against evil in a fantasy environment, the team decided to force players to think carefully about what course of action they took. "We had a theme to the storyline," explains Harvey. "That is to say, the story had a point, or a moral. The moral was: 'Think before you act; be aware of the consequences of your actions'. This moral is supported by the plot." As the player descended ever further into the labyrinth this became more and more apparent and several moral judgements had to be made in order to progress – the actions of which had a telling impact on the eventual outcome of the adventure. "For example, if you indiscriminately kill goblins, then you will miss the opportunity to make allies of them later in the quest" explains Harvey. "You can still finish the game but you get a different ending at best." Few games of this type ever attempted to portray tangible consequences to the player's actions in the same way *The Immortal* did.

Possibly the most memorable aspect of *The Immortal* was the innovative combat engine. At certain points the player was able to engage enemies in one-on-one combat. In the console and PC versions the viewpoint would quickly switch to a close up of the two combatants, and by combining button presses with the direction pad the player was able to swing a particularly sharp sword at their quarry. Evasive manoeuvres were also possible, allowing for an effortless shift between offensive and defensive postures. This called for a refined sense of timing, as it was imperative that the sword swipes and dodges were executed correctly. It hardly ranks as the most awe-inspiring fighting engine ever crafted but remains a definite improvement on the usual turn-based variety seen in fantasy adventures of the era.

The incredible enemy death animations were the icing on the cake and unsurprisingly they caused the design team a few headaches when it came to porting the game to the 'kiddie friendly' home console market: "Sega

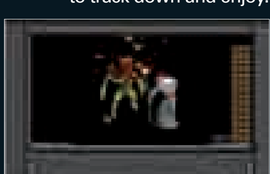
"IT'S KIND OF HARD TO HAVE A WIZARD'S HEAD BLOW UP WITHOUT BLOOD" WILL HARVEY



» Sanitised, gore-free combat ensues in the NES conversion.

DEATH ANIMATIONS

While many games of the 16-bit era featured large doses of death and destruction, few came close to attaining the same level of detail as *The Immortal*. Pre-dating *Mortal Kombat's* fatalities by a couple of years, defeating each enemy rewarded the player with a grisly, ultra-violent 'finishing move'. Some of these were fairly straightforward – a quick sword swipe removing the head from the torso, for example – but others were slightly more extravagant. The player was confronted with exploding craniums, flaming incineration and spontaneous combustion in this most gruesome of fantasy games. Considering the frail appearance of the game's main character, these inventive forms of execution were made all the more shocking. It's little wonder that Nintendo refused to allow Harvey's team to incorporate them into the NES conversion – which leaves the warts-and-all Mega Drive port as the definitive console version to track down and enjoy.





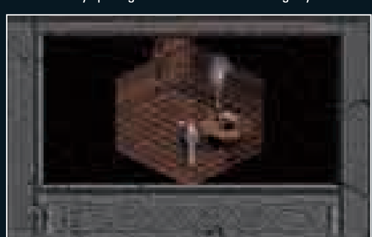
» Our wizard chum appears to be offering this dragon a sore throat lozenge – what a thoughtful chap.



» Mystical-malarkey abounds as the wizard takes flight on his lucky, lucky carpet.



» The actually-quite-good NES version in all its glory.



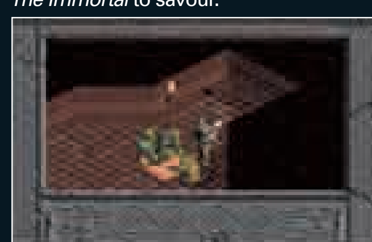
» We had an amusing caption for here but we forgot it.

were fine with the death animations, but Nintendo weren't," remembers Harvey. "They made us get rid of the blood in the NES version." This was standard procedure as far as Nintendo was concerned (who could possibly forget the infamous SNES version of *Mortal Kombat*, which lacked the biggest selling point of the game – gore?). Harvey and his team – so used to having total freedom when coding for the Apple IIGS – could do nothing but comply with the request. "It's kind of hard to have a wizard's head blow up without blood, but we did what we could" he says with a wry smile. Regardless of this, Harvey is proud of what his team achieved with the limited power of Nintendo's aging 8-bit machine. "The graphics on the NES were unprecedented at the time," he says with a sense of pride. Indeed, when placed alongside the 16-bit versions, the Nintendo port doesn't look as shoddy as you might expect.

One characteristic of *The Immortal* that went down slightly less well with many sectors of the gaming public was the preference for unpredictable and wholly unexpected deaths. At many points within the game the player would be killed simply for stepping on the wrong spot or speaking to a character without having a certain item in their inventory. Playing without a guidebook quickly changed the game into an almost tiresome process of trial and error. It was essential to find out what mistakes to avoid by dying a few times, then completing the level with this vital knowledge in hand. One infamous section involved inspecting a seemingly harmless skeleton for valuable items. Replying positively when asked to inspect 'something wet' underneath the bones resulted in the player being instantly dissolved by deadly slime. To some this kind of structure proved to be an almost insurmountable obstacle to enjoyment, but to others it harked back to the unforgiving graphical adventures of old and gave the game an edgy, unpredictable quality. At times the level of tension was almost unbearable and it made players more wary of wandering into situations that might prove to be fatal. Besides, the elaborate player death animations often went some way to softening the disappointment of an unexpected demise.

Although *The Immortal* garnered worldwide success and healthy sales, it wasn't enough to gain a sequel. Sandcastle Entertainment began to dabble in online gaming technology, creating tools that permitted smooth, lag-free gaming between online players. The company was eventually purchased by Adobe in 1997 and the following year Harvey founded 'There Inc' from a room in his parents' house, working alongside artist Jeffrey Ventrella to create the immersive and open-ended virtual 3D world 'There'.

Although it was originally designed with communication and social interaction in mind, Harvey found that the company's investors didn't share his utopian vision and in 2004 the decision was made to ditch the consumer side of the business and develop exclusively for (more profitable) military and government applications of the technology. Harvey had left by this point and was already working on a tantalising new project called 'IMVU' (www.imvu.com) – the next generation of instant messaging. Using fully customisable 3D avatars, people from all over the world are now able to create themselves in an online world and converse with friends as if they were in the same space. According to Harvey, the service has over 7 million users and is growing faster than more traditional social networking sites like MySpace. With yet another success under his belt, time will tell if Harvey decides to step back into the video-gaming arena and produce another unique experience for fans of *The Immortal* to savour.



» "Which way now?"



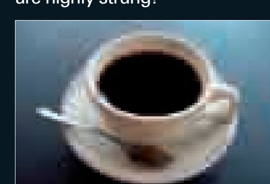
» We're sure we've already seen this in Raiders of the Lost Ark…



» "Now it's your turn."

MAKE MINE A DECAF

Harvey was extremely fond of inserting secret 'Easter eggs' into many of his games – *Zany Golf* famously featured a secret hole that was almost impossible to access, and Harvey's conversion of Mark Cerny's arcade classic *Marble Madness* shipped with an additional level that even Cerny himself was unaware of. *The Immortal* was no exception and contained a highly unusual hidden section. "The secret level in the Apple version has an almost infinite corridor with the design team of the game hidden at the end," reveals Harvey. "On Level five you had to make it through the trap door room and fall into the last hole without using your trap door sensor, then walk for 15 minutes in the corridor. You also needed the 'coffee maker' object which is found earlier in the game for when you meet one of the team, otherwise he kills you." Who says game designers are highly strung?



Whatever happened to...

MAIL PLANE

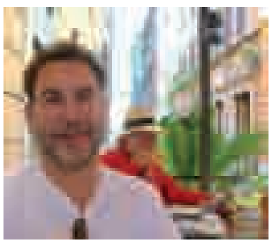
NEED TO KNOW

SYSYEM:
VECTREX

DEVELOPER:
MARK INDICTOR

START OF DEVELOPMENT:
1983

DATE OF CANCELLATION:
1983



» Mark Indictor reveals why *Mail Plane* took twice as long to develop as other Vectrex games, and also what made it so special.

FOLLOWING OUR RECENT VECTREX COVERAGE, FRANK GASKING CASTS A SPOTLIGHT OVER A GAME THAT HAS GENERATED FEVERED SPECULATION FOR MANY YEARS, AND STILL CONTINUES TO THROW UP A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS…

The Vectrex is a favourite among retro enthusiasts, being home to excellent vector-based renditions of *Asteroids, Pole Position* and *Scramble* among others. Sadly not a huge amount software was developed for this wonderful little machine, with many titles falling by the wayside toward its premature end. However, before the death of the Vectrex, a new light-pen accessory was one of many new peripherals introduced in the hope of pushing the console out to a wider audience and attempting to save the machine. Several titles were developed with dedicated support for the new peripheral including *Art Master* and *AnimAction*, but adverts also revealed another title, one that never quite made it, known simply as *Mail Plane*.

Developed by Mark Indictor (creator of Vectrex titles *Spinball* and *Polar Rescue*) and designed by his then brother-in-law Jeffrey Corsiglia, *Mail Plane* was an educational title that put you in control of a plane travelling around the United States, delivering mail to state capitals – and at the same time helping children learn state and city names. The game was split into several sections. You started by tracing your flight route on a map of the US, before loading your plane with mail and taking off safely. Once airborne the game adopted an overhead view as you flew to your destination, avoiding storm clouds, mountains and other obstacles in an *Asteroids*-style section. Upon completing a whole delivery run, the difficulty level increased with more deliveries and worsening storm conditions.

Mark reveals that his memory of the game's development is sketchy, but he remembers details about the creating the game's map. "My wife helped me encode the map of the US that was complete with state lines. I traced it on a piece of onion-skin graph paper, and then identified vertices of the map. I developed a data-structure that the drawing logic could parse very quickly, creating the required vectors to build the map. I think that there were different zoom levels. My wife typed in the co-ordinates of the vertices into a text file, which I then adapted to the data structure in 6809 assembly language. We're still married, by the way."

Graphically *Mail Plane* was clean and functional throughout, with good realistic sounds according to those who were lucky enough to see/hear the game in action. Being an educational title, the game itself was fairly simplistic and didn't actually require use of the light-pen much at all. "The gameplay was pretty shallow and the difficulty was minimal, involving some very rudimentary eye-hand co-ordination to 'fly' your plane from one state capital to the next. It was more of a learning game, teaching the player the names of the American state capitals. I remember that I didn't know many of them when I programmed it."

Mark reveals that the development of a Vectrex game usually took around two months, yet *Mail Plane* took twice that amount of time because the light-pen hardware posed new challenges. "The



» According to various sources, the graphics were well defined with realistic sound effects.



» Having traced your route, you had to load your plane and then take to the sky.

» *Mail Plane* was one delivery that never made its destination.





» The opening screen all Vectrex users hope to see some day.



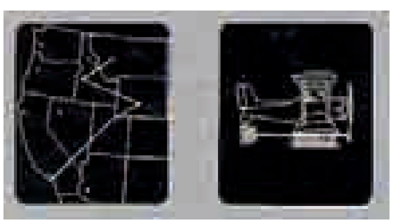
» Quite possibly the rarest Vectrex game ever made.



» *Mail Plane* and a number of other rare carts were displayed by Chris Romero at the US GCE.

light-pen was a bit problematic, but after tweaking a few of the routines that did primitive pen location and tracking it was more reliable. I thought that the light-pen was fun, and had a good time with that part of the game."

Despite overrunning on development, the game was actually completed and ready for release, but for reasons that escape Mark it was consigned to the scrapheap. "I don't know why it wasn't released. I recall that there wasn't a lot of commitment when we developed this game – I had very little direction except for a few drawings and a very terse storyboard. I suspected that it had to do with the fact that GCE was floundering at this point. It's also possible that CGE thought it was just too boring." Whatever the reason – *Mail Plane* was left to gather dust for many years.



» **Tracing your route was relatively simple and the gameplay isn't all that, but people will still pay good money for *Mail Plane*.**



» Selected items from Mark's Vectrex development system, including a *Mail Plane* cartridge.

PROTO FINISH

Since the Vectrex's commercial collapse in 1984, several *Mail Plane* prototypes of varying completion have surfaced – and promptly disappeared. One brief owner was Jason Moore (editor of the Retro Games fanzine) who borrowed a working prototype from Michael Reid (whose relatives worked for MB) to produce an article on the game. Not able to raise £300 to eventually buy it, the game was returned, and before Jason could raise the cash, Michael had long gone (for the full story you can check out Jason's interview in **Retro Gamer** issue nine).

A second sighting saw Chris Romero at the Classic Gaming Expo in America with his prototype collection featuring the elusive *Mail Plane* in a prototype cartridge case. Chris had ported other Vectrex titles



» Who knows what those black marks are blanking out?

but not this – a ROM dump is apparently out of the question for now.

The final sighting intrigues the most. Mark sold his Vectrex development system (including eight-inch floppy disks and a cartridge labelled '*Mail Plane*') to a guy known only as 'Alfred' many years ago. Everything was later sold to Fred Wilk, a former employee at GCE. At first, Fred was welcomed by the Vectrex community, elaborating on the likes of *Mail Plane*, but things turned sour as it became apparent that Fred wanted to make money by auctioning materials. Corey Cole (www.classicgaming.com/vectrex) recalls: "Prices were steep, so bidders pooled resources and bid in groups. Fred realised this was keeping down final bids." The final asking price for *Mail Plane* was rumoured to be $5,000 and it went unsold. As a result, Fred fell out with the Vectrex community and disappeared with *Mail Plane*, never to be seen again. Hopes of Mark having a backup sadly faded too when he confirmed that one doesn't exist. It is suggested, however, that Fred eventually sold most of Mark's equipment to another unknown collector, fuelling hopes that the full game could yet be saved. Interestingly, Fred was also the source to Chris Romero's incomplete prototype cartridge.

With confirmed prototypes out there somewhere it is hoped that *Mail Plane* will one day resurface. Thanks to Corey you can at least check out some rare screenshots of the game in action. A taster before Vectrex enthusiasts finally get their Holy Grail? We certainly hope so…

OTHER LOST VECTREX TITLES

BATTER UP / PITCHER'S DUEL (1983)
Like *Mail Plane*, a prototype of this baseball game is still lost at sea. The Classic Gaming website, however, shows screenshots reportedly from a prototype that had been supplied for review (http://www.classicgaming.com/vectrex/pitchersduel.htm). However, no dump of the game has been made yet and the Vectrex community is waiting on tenterhooks to see if they will ever get to play it.

TOUR DE FRANCE (1983)
Take on the tough *Tour De France* via the comfort of your Vectrex and minus any heavy pedalling. Another game from Mark Indictor that never fully saw the light of day, but this time a happier story. From one of the very few prototypes out there, this was kindly preserved for the Vectrex community to enjoy and can now be found on various websites.

DARK TOWER (1983)
Dark Tower was based on the Milton Bradley electronic board game of the same name and was an obvious title to convert to the Vectrex. From its only known prototype source, this once most wanted Vectrex title (alongside *Mail Plane*) managed to eventually find its way into the hands of Vectrex gamers and enthusiasts alike.



» Sadly, we've never seen *Mail Plane* in the flesh, but we have dreamed about it.

"IT WAS MORE OF A LEARNING GAME, TEACHING THE PLAYER THE NAMES OF THE AMERICAN STATE CAPITALS. I REMEMBER THAT I DIDN'T KNOW MANY OF THEM WHEN I PROGRAMMED IT" MARK INDICTOR

Thanks to Corey Cole for information and photos on *Mail Plane*, and Mark Indictor for his kind input.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: ANDY WALKER

DATE OF BIRTH: 10/11/49

FIRST JOB: RADIO OFFICER AT SEA

CURRENTLY: R&D MANAGER FOR CASINO GAMING

FAVOURITE FILM: DAS BOOT

ANDY WALKER

HE SAILED THE SEAS AS A LAD AND THEN RODE THE EQUALLY TURBULENT WATERS OF SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EIGHTIES. HIS COMPANY, TASKSET, WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUCH CHARMINGLY ENGLISH TITLES AS BOZO'S NIGHT OUT AND POSTER PASTER, SUGGESTING YOU CAN'T EVER TAKE BRIDLINGTON OUT OF THE BOY. ANDY WALKER TELLS PAUL DRURY WHY HE DOES LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE

Bridlington is a long way from Damascus, but it was there that Andy Walker saw the light. It was flickering from the screen of a cabinet in a seafront arcade in his hometown.

"That was where I discovered videogames," recalls Andy in soft Yorkshire tones. "A bit arrogant I know, but I thought, I can do better that that. Bloody silly, looking back…"

It was an unexpected epiphany for an ex-civil servant in his thirties, married with three kids. Born shortly after the end of the Second World War, Andy had spent his youth on the ocean waves as a radio operator, before joining the Foreign Office and spending ten years in the service of Her Majesty in numerous far-flung locales. He'd had some dealings with mainframes while posted in exotic Cheltenham and when the charmingly titled Honeywell 316, an early mini-computer, landed on his desk in 1977, he had the bug.

"I couldn't believe the power at my fingertips. I was hooked."

His addiction grew when he got his hands on an 8080 microcomputer and taught himself how to program in hex code, but producing a playable version of *Space Invaders* with eight switches, eight LEDs and no screen display was a big ask. When he quit the civil service after they threatened to send him to places where 'my life insurance wasn't valid', he decided he would have to build his own computer if he was ever to create something to sit beside those machines in Frankie Wilson's on the front.

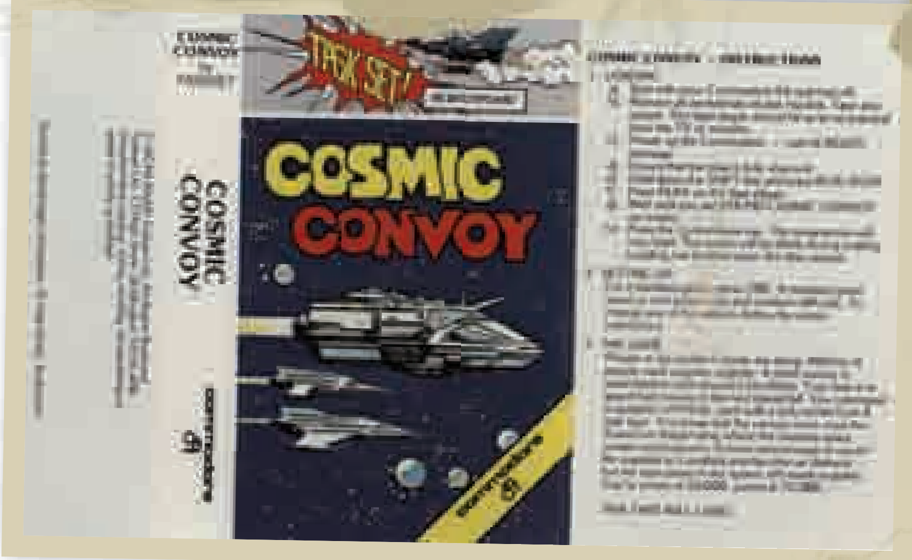
"I had an old Tangerine," he remembers. "I fiddled about, designed my own bits, got a local company to build circuit boards to

YOU MUST PLAY…

Jammin'

Part arcade puzzler, part Bob Marley homage, this clever, colourful title typifies what made the best Taskset releases so distinctive – a refreshingly leftfield concept backed up with solid gameplay and superlative graphics and sound. "*Jammin'* was mainly Tony's," states Andy Walker, "but every game that has ever appeared under the AWE or Taskset banner has been a collaborative effort. I've just been fortunate in the people I've come across." Taskset was the team you could trust and *Jammin'* is a head-nodding reminder of the good old days.





» Andy may dismiss *Cosmic Convoy* as 'crap', but he still notes it was possibly the first C64 game to use interrupt driven sound.



» Coded before *Dig Dug* and *Mr Do!*, *The Pit* is a gem worth excavating.

supplement the minimal RAM, sound and graphics capabilities of the old Tangerine. I wrote an early version of *Andromeda*, which I trashed because it was crap, but I was still hooked. The second version wasn't rubbish and so I decided the venture could work. That's when I employed Tony Gibson."

C64 gamers should recognise the name. Tony moved up from Devon to join the small Bridlington based company and would become instrumental when they moved into home development, but for now, Andy Walker Electronics was in the arcade business. Their first foray into an industry dominated by big American and Japanese firms was a clever bit of custom hardware that would allow arcade operators to swap ROM cartridges by simply opening the cabinet door and plugging in the latest game. It was a neat idea – 'a videogame jukebox', enthuses Andy – and so AWE packed all their gear into a rented Nissan van and headed to London for the annual Coin-Op show.

Setting up their stall next to Konami, they attracted the interest of Norman Parker, an established name in coin-op and with highly useful contacts in the US. He helped them not only make deals around their innovative bit of pre-JAMMA technology, he suggested they sell the three completed games they had in their show-reel – *Andromeda*, *Hunter* and *The Pit* – to Centuri of Miami.

The latter title was the strongest of the trio. Released in 1982, the dig and discover gameplay of *The Pit* was in fact the result of a coding oversight. "It started when *Andromeda* was halfway through development and one of the many bugs meant the spaceship didn't rub itself out properly. A trail of pixels was left behind until you swooped round in a loop and rubbed them out as you went. Ah, that's mega! There's a game in that, we thought. And we did it – the digging idea all came from that one afternoon."

So the boys on Bridlington High Street created a sweet little arcade title, based around an intrepid explorer tunnelling through the earth, avoiding tumbling rocks and adversaries, while collecting buried gems on his way. But hang on; doesn't this sound rather like Namco's *Dig Dug*, released the same year? Andy laughs and dishes us the dirt. "Atari (*Dig Dug's* publisher) said they'd sue our ass. In the end, it became clear our copyright date was ahead of theirs. You can do that in the States. It cost us a few hundred dollars and we had about four pence, but we registered it on the advice of this US agent. I suppose we could have sued them, but we were small and Namco had a fighting fund of about $24 million. We weren't going to win…"

'WITH BOZO'S NIGHT OUT, WE SHOULD HAVE DONE A DEAL WITH A BREWER, THOUGH IT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN SOMETHING CRAP LIKE WATNEY'S RED BARREL…' ANDY ON WOBBLE JUICE

Helped by the fact that another of Parker's contractors, Chris Stamper, converted the game to run on a Galaxian board for the UK market, *The Pit* proved to be a commercial success. Andy and his team went on to handle several arcade projects, notably the shoot-'em-up *GWNN (Game With No Name)*, but it was becoming clear to the Yorkshire lads that competing with the likes of Taito was going to be tough. Fortunately, the home computer market was just starting to get into gear.

"Taskset was born just like that," says Andy, before acknowledging their first release *Dig Dog*, a two-fingered response to Atari's bullying tactics, was hardly a safe bet. "We were messing about in a naïve way. Because I'd known the Tangerine blokes, when they brought out the Oric, we did it for that. It was beautifully shaped as a door wedge and that's what it became – great for doors, really bad at rendering any kind of colour. It used the 6502, which the boys were familiar with, but in commercial terms we'd backed the horse with three legs. We should have been doing Speccy work, though it seemed like everyone and his cousin was doing that."

Uncle Clive's zombie-fleshed baby may have seemed the sensible way forward, but it was the arrival of the C64 that really invigorated the team. While Andy dismisses their first effort, *Cosmic Convoy*, as 'crap', when they decided to revisit an arcade title they had manufactured



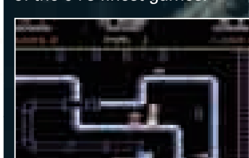
» The Taskset logo, in all its Pop Art glory. Andy's admiration for Roy Lichtenstein is obvious…



» The Taskset team (l-r) Paul Hodgson, Kae, Adrian, Andy Nutter, Andy Walker, Andy Rixon, Ann, Mark Buttery. 'Pints for everyone and a G&T for Ann,' remembers the boss.

I'LL GET MY WRENCH OUT…

"Intertec Superbrains were wonderful machines," begins Andy, explaining the origins of Taskset's most famous creation. "I thought they were absolutely the dog's bollocks at the time. We had two, one with a hard drive, and Tony was working on one when directly above him, a pipe burst. How it missed our prize development tools I'll never know. We needed a plumber fast." And so the *Pipeline* concept was born, in that leaky office at the back of Bridlington High Street. Andy Rixon joined the team as a graphic artist and the arcade version was produced in the small AWE factory. So, are the C64 versions, that we're more familiar with, direct ports? "Oh they're a good generation on. The arcade version was portrait aspect and the pipeline only really wiggled from the top to the bottom on the right-hand two thirds of the screen, with the adversaries on the left-hand side. It was quite different. *Super Pipeline* was early in our experience of the C64, we were still learning, and it was obvious it could do a lot more, so we were pleased to have a second shot with the sequel." SP2 hit the mark and remains one of the 64's finest games.



» One leaky pipe, three great games…



» *Cad Cam Warrior* boasted 8000 screens, though this one may feel familiar… Thanks to lemon64.com for these.



» **Below:** *Bozo's Night Out* was alcohol fuelled but 'Gibbo's Joint' may have alluded to *Jammin'*…



» Andy's hugely successful Digger T Rock for the NES proved it's always worth answering the call of the Stampers.

in-house on a very limited production run called *Pipeline*, things started to happen. *Super Pipeline* (see Do It Yourself for the intriguing tale of its genesis) was joined by *Jammin'*, a wonderfully colourful title with a rocksteady beat, and suddenly Taskset had a brace of hits.

"We tried to launch in pairs," explains Andy. "It wasn't clear what the market wanted so we thought we'd output a range. *Jammin'* was a great game and the theme and characterisation was all Tony's. He was full of good ideas but getting them done was like pulling teeth. Paul Hodgson did all the music and sound routines. It was never going to happen otherwise. It was the start of a general falling out between Tony and I. He didn't want to be an employed person anymore, but didn't want to do his own publishing, so he became a contractor – the only one we ever had."

'TIM STAMPER PHONED ME OUT OF THE BLUE AND ASKED IF I WANTED A NINTENDO CONTRACT. I WAS BITING THROUGH THE PHONE…'

ANDY ON WHEN RARE PHONED A FRIEND

This marriage of convenience was still strong enough to produce the intoxicating *Bozo's Night Out* the following year. It was a wildly original tale of a hapless hero knocking back one too many and having to stagger home (in an inspired move, the joystick controls became increasingly erratic as you consumed more 'wobble juice'), while avoiding both muggers, and ladies of the night.

"Instantly understandable that one," says Andy. "Bridlington High Street, where our offices were, had 11 pubs and our answer phone message was, 'You're through to Taskset but we're all down the pub'. We talked about having a bladder gauge in the game, but there would have been a lot of pissing it up the wall and competitions about who could get it highest, which would have been awful. If I'd been a proper marketing person, I would have done a deal with a brewer. Though it probably would have been something crap like Watney's Red Barrel…"

The ideas were flowing as fast as the bitter down at Taskset. *Super Pipeline 2* improved greatly on the original, *Poster Paster* starred the irrepressible Bill Stickers in the prescient move of having a strong character lead a game and *Seaside Special* introduced the excellent concept of throwing radioactive seaweed at politicians. Taskset became synonymous with originality, graphical flair and cheeky postcard covers.

Yet despite the commercial success, cracks were becoming evident. *Seaside Special* turned out to be Tony Gibson's final Taskset release. "I wasn't thrilled with the theme but I didn't mind if it was a good game. It was crap, and Tony must know that. It was very, very late and it caused a rift between us. Handbags at 20 yards."

With Tony gone and an increasing disillusionment with the big retailers, Andy called time on the business. Taskset's final releases didn't quite have that distinctive quality – *Gyropod* was intended to be 'a far more frenetic shooter' and *Souls Of Darkon* was a tentative step into graphic adventures, though *Cad Cam Warrior* showed admirable ambition (see 'Message in a Bottle').

Andy was happiest when he was writing games, and not burdened with accounts or marketing strategies. After the demise of Taskset, he continued in the industry as a freelancer, taking on work as diverse as a *Dragon's Lair* conversion, *Road Wars* on the Amiga and even meeting the mighty Brian Jacks while coding *Uchi Mata*.

"Paul Hodgson and I went down to his Judo school in Sevenoaks and in no time he was 'Let me show you this' and wallop, I'm on the floor. Doing that game was a real laugh and I think we were both ready for a good giggle."

The life of a freelancer is full of unexpected delights, none more so than when you get that call out of the blue. "The phone rang and it was Tim Stamper, head of Rare, who had a really good reputation by then. The Stampers had remembered me from our arcade days and asked me if I wanted to do a Nintendo contract. I said I might… while biting through the phone…"

The resulting *Digger T Rock* sold in excess of 200,000 copies, but was to be Andy's last videogame project. He returned to his coin-op roots, but this time in the fruit machine business. Since the early-Nineties, he's worked with numerous companies and is especially proud of his video fruit, Mazooma Bell, and Cashanova. Now approaching retirement, he spends his days coding in hex for the gaming industry, gainfully employed as an R&D manager for a casino company, but still finds time to wander along Bridlington seafront to assess the state of play.

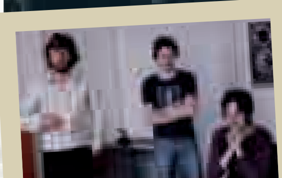
"A good game is still a good game, whether it's a videogame or a fruitee. Everyday, I'm asking myself, 'Will people pay money to play this?' I love what I do. It's mega. And I got to play an original *Battlezone* earlier this year, too…"

DO IT YOURSELF

"Hats off to Andy Rixon", comments Andy, when asked about the creation of such memorable characters as *Jammin*'s Rankin Rodney, the gin-blossomed Bozo and the sprightly Bill Stickers. "His characterisation was pivotal. He was just plain good at it. And the rest of the company invested heavily in the time and technology for him to do it. We spent as much time creating graphic and sound utilities as we did writing games. We couldn't buy what we needed." This bespoke approach, with everything done in-house by a committed team that worked, played and drank together, helps explain why Taskset's back-catalogue may have a diverse range of titles, from shoot 'em ups to drink 'em ups, they share a common polish and willingness to experiment. "I think our trademark was that we did everything ourselves. In the days of *Super Pipeline*, we would copy the games onto a twin cassette deck on the kitchen table; the wife stuck on the labels and then popped them into the post to those that had sent us a postal order for £5.99. It was a great shame when it stopped being a cottage industry. I know it was vital, but I hated running the business side. Not writing games was irritating."

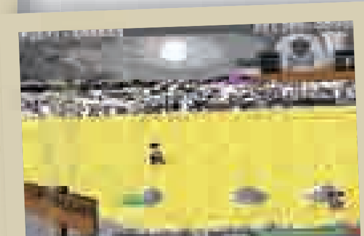


» Mrs Walker got this label spot on. Then made breakfast.





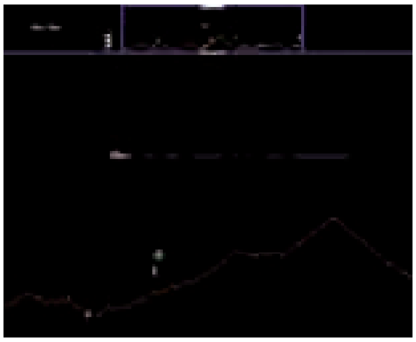
» **Left:** The Taskset boys ponder if the pub is open yet… **Above:** Andy with his beloved Jag. See what he did with that number plate?



» *Seaside Special*: Politics 1 Gameplay 0

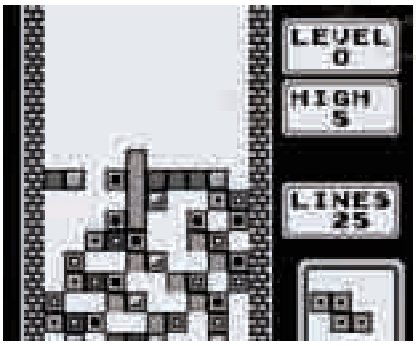


ANDY WALKER DESERT ISLAND DISKS



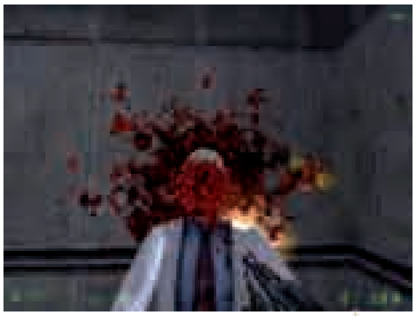
DEFENDER ARCADE

1 Absolutely blew me away – just the speed of the thing. Lovely rich control and the very best explosions money could buy. And remember, people had to buy the right to play – a day's play was expensive but it was never a waste of money.



TETRIS GAMEBOY

2 Clever, neat, very simple, super addictive. Easiest tournament game to setup (not a right lot of use on a desert island). So you reckon you can think under pressure?



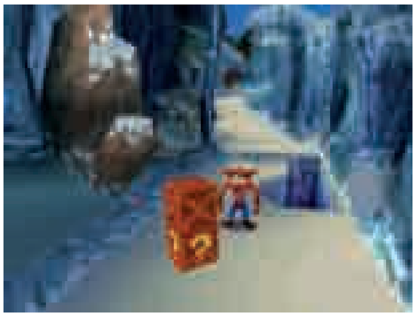
HALF-LIFE PC

3 I know, I know, *Half-Life 2* is more polished and extends the theme, but the original hit the market as new, dark and a real gem. You absolutely *knew* you shouldn't be here – heh heh but hell, just a bit more – usually followed by *whaaamm* where'd that come from? Complete involvement.



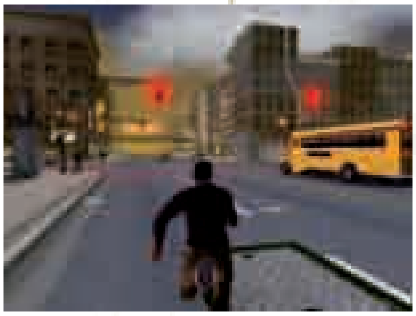
GALAXIANS ARCADE

4 Relax – just shoot some more. Damn, dead again. Three more lives – can't do it if you think about it – brain:out – go again.



CRASH BANDICOOT 2 PLAYSTATION

5 I've never played the original but *Cortex Strikes Back* represents the modern platformer in all its polished glory. The full corporate experience, backup, cheats, support groups. Underlying it all is one of the best video game characters of all time. Big, big worlds and flawless control.



GRAND THEFT AUTO III PLAYSTATION2

6 Everyone needs a driving game. Ha – bosh – new drive. Can't do that! (Just done it). Everyone should drive *GTA*.



BWB'S GERMAN SINBAD FUNGAME ARCADE

7 Looks like an AWP but you're playing for points. No, you're playing for glory. Get to the crypt in the centre of the triangle – unforgettable presentation. It just drives you on – you *know* it's a gamble too far, but you go anyway.



IGTS DOUBLE DIAMOND ARCADE

8 Do you feel lucky? Play and you'll find out. It may take you over 100,000 plays to be sure – but you'll know if this is your day. What a classic. You only need *one* button – MaxBet. Go for it.

› ANDY WALKER

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



Mayhem: Do you have a picture of that 3D model map of *Cad Cam Warrior* that was reported being built in an early issue of *Zzap!64*? And in *Super Pipeline 2,* why do the lobsters look like scorpions?
"Yes, I know many of those 8,000 screens were very similar, but they were all different and we really did try to make a physical model of some of it, but failed miserably. The basic screen size was about 5mm square and the colours were significant, the interconnections and the cross-over points were significant. Trying to make it balance on a desk became impossible. We decided to get on with the next game. There are no pictures of it but it lives on in our minds. And as for scorpions, they're six-legged Venusian pipe spiders."

Paranoid Marvin: What was your initial reaction to being asked to convert Laserdisc game *Dragons Lair*?
"It was fine. That was money! It was just a contract – the most mercenary one I've ever done. And Paul Hodgson, what an absolute star. We were finishing it in Liverpool in rented offices and it was the usual story of deadlines and 36-hour stints. He was actually asleep, typing. Absolutely comatose, but still hacking assembler. That's not bad, is it?"

Fgasking: Are there any Taskset games that never saw the light of day?
"When I'm developing something, I'm easily sidetracked, so we had this 'bag of ideas' in the office, where we'd write down game ideas. I remember one we began, called something like *Vulcan*. We had bomb-aiming sights and you were beating up runways, but we couldn't make the topography work fast enough. It could have been good, with limitless targets to go for but no, it went in the bin. I'm sure there were plenty more we junked but I'm old now – the memories fall out of my head onto the pillow at night."

YakMag: Was *Seaside Special* your way of raising awareness of the environment to a generation that may not have thought otherwise?
"Tony [Gibson] really was into those politics, but he wanted to do it as a political statement instead of as a good game. I thought it was sensationalist and that needs to be supported by a good game. Had it been good, we wouldn't have had a difference. People told me it would stand the test and we published it, against my better judgement. I shouldn't have. It was the final falling out with Tony. The end of an era. I keep in touch with a lot of the lads, but not Tony."

Northway: Taskset seemed to have loads of interesting designs but were you too off-beat?
"[laughs] Too off-beat to be commercial. Yeah, he's probably right. We should have concentrated on a cute character and used it over and over again, maybe with the *Pipeline* plumber, using him in lots of situations. But we always wanted to move on to the next game. The next idea was always better. Didn't make commercial sense, but more fun."

BubandBob: In your opinion, what is the best 8-bit?
"The 64! Not even close. That was a games machine from a company that knew how to develop a games machine. Then they went on to actually tell me the Amiga was a business machine and we should be developing interactive word processors for it. That's a direct quote from Commodore's senior development team. That's appalling, isn't it?"

The Master: Who is your favourite *Dr Who*?
"The modern ones, because you get Billie Piper with them…"

Fandenivoldski: Where did the inspiration for *Jammin'* come from? Did you guys take a lot of drugs?
"We're never going to admit to anything like that. *Bozo's Night Out* followed, so draw your own conclusions."

Merman: The control methods for Taskset games tend to be very straightforward. Do you prefer simple controls, given that we now live in an era of multi-button pads?
"I thought *Micro Machines* made good use of a multi-button pad, with two of you on one controller, but no, simple controls work for me. In the Eighties, what was there, apart from a stick and a button or two? We did mess about with *Souls Of Darkon*, but I was never into typing games. A nice big fire button will do me."

For your chance to quiz future castaways please visit the **Retro Gamer** forums at www.retrogamer.net/forum

WINGS OF WOR

MR MISTER LOVES THIS GAME



- **PUBLISHER:** DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

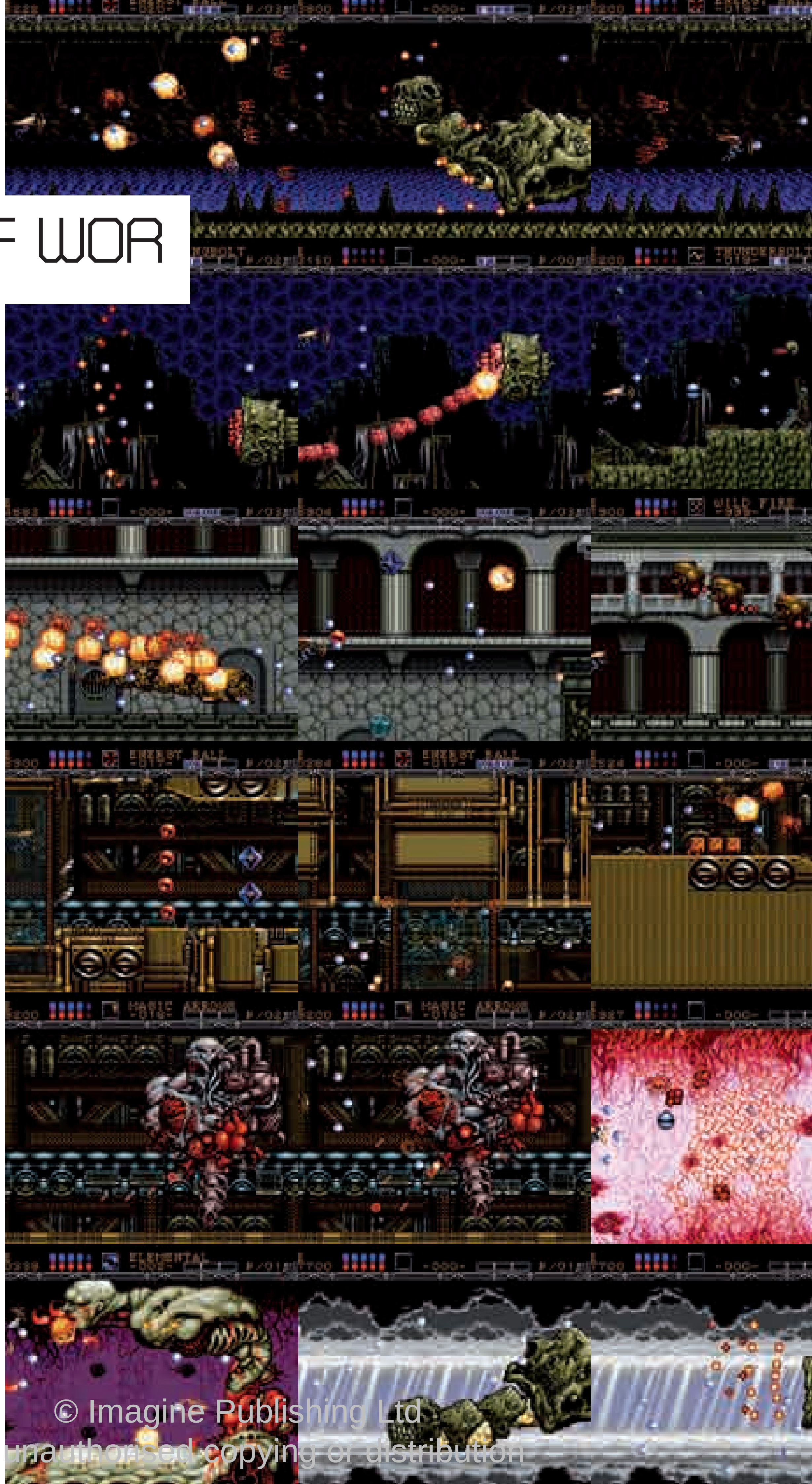
Playing *Wings Of Wor* (or *Gynoug* as it's known in the East) is not for the faint-hearted. And that's not just because it features some of the creepiest looking sprites to ooze their way onto Sega's 16-bit machine. No, it's because it's one of the most difficult shooters around. One that will have you cursing in frustration as much as you marvel at its lush, bio-mechanical aesthetics and gloriously dark soundtrack.

Unlike other Mega Drive shooters of the time, *Wings Of Wor* placed you in the feathered wings of a lone warrior who had to battle against some of the most gruesome opponents the genre has ever seen. While *R-Type* may have set the bar for terrifying opponents (particularly its massive bosses), *Wings Of Wor* ignores it completely and fills its alien-looking worlds with a selection of outrageous-looking mayors that wouldn't look out of place in your worst nightmares.

Indeed, every single boss you encounter, whether it's the smaller mid-level foes, or the huge behemoths that are introduced at the end of each stage – accompanied by what sounds like the opening few notes of *A Nightmare On Elm Street* – are ghastly looking monstrosities whose disgusting visages are only second to the sheer amount of bullets they can absorb. Eventually though, the hideous mutations will succumb to your angel's superior firepower and you can move on to the next suitably gothic-looking location.

Wings Of Wor may be a thrilling experience, but that's not to say it doesn't have its flaws. Sprites throughout are incredibly tiny and often indistinctive – no doubt to make its many bosses look even more imposing – while even smaller bullets mean that death is plentiful and often unfair, especially when flying through some of *Wings Of Wor*'s more detailed backdrops, with the stunningly beautiful bloodstream level springing instantly to mind.

For all its frustrations, *Wings Of Wor* still remains a satisfying blaster, especially if you're a big fan of the grim and macabre. If only it wasn't so damned hard…





THE CLASSIC GAME

METRO-CROSS

Ever wondered how Track & Field would play out if it was set in a lengthy intergalactic corridor, where hurdles paired up with giant Coke cans and winning a race didn't cause your control pad to burst into tears? You can officially stop wondering…

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM SPORTS
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £40+ (PCB BOARD)



» It doesn't bode well when 20 seconds into the game your character looks like he's about to keel over and die.

Never mention that you're about to feed a copy of *Track & Field* to your NES while your D-pad is in earshot, its ferocious thumb-thumping action is proven to take its toll on hand/control pad relationships. With the exception of the painfully great Track & Field, utilising the ancient art of 'button mashing' has become the videogame equivalent of toe-punting, two-foot tackling and glory supporting. Ripped from the book of correct controller etiquette, a barefaced display of 'hitting and hoping', inside certain arcades, is reputed to cause enraged onlookers to sneer, hiss, and even speedup end-credit countdowns, as naïve arcadians frantically dart towards change counters to trade tatty fivers for extra lives. So you should thank Namco for *Metro-Cross*, an arcade run-'em-up which did away with all that button-bashing malarkey, allowing gamers to sleep easy in their beds and break away from the pressures of appropriate gaming protocol.

The idea of *Metro-Cross* is relatively straightforward; reach a checkpoint before time runs out. The quicker you are; the more points you earn. Things start to become a little strange, however, when a team of colossal Coke cans are rolled out to try to pour precious seconds off your stringent time-limit. It's not made entirely clear why you're being asked to run through a futuristic vision of *Takeshi's Castle*. Or for that matter, why your isolated athlete has been blessed with such an extraordinarily large chin. Luckily, neither of these questions demand answers because *Metro-Cross* is one of those joyous arcade games where simplicity continually passes the baton to enjoyment, and everything else just takes a backseat on the bleachers. It's a race against the clock; a real test of reflexes and a great consumer of loose change. Split over an exhausting 32 stages, in four-race chunks, your character, donning tight orange spandex, must reach an electronic checkpoint before time runs out and an insane amount of electricity is jetted into his bones.

Every track houses a smorgasbord of pitfalls; with shoulder-nipping rats scuttling along the floor, primitive hurdles cluttering the levels, annoying walls generating from the floor and red cubes menacingly marching across the screen poised to flatten any hapless runner should they stray onto the *get-beaten* track. As well as the perils that lie on the path, the isometric checkerboard flooring also likes to offer its own contribution of nuisances. Running over green panels will dramatically slow your runner down, while inviting-looking potholes will try to swallow him up, and strange square panels will spring him into the stratosphere like a comet, leaving behind a colourful trail of confetti debris after lift-off.

It's not all bad news though, as can-shaped power-ups can be collected along the way which help to even the score. Green cans, if kicked, will offer the runner a much needed speed boost, and the blue cans, if crushed, will temporarily



» 'Ok, own up, who built over the swimming pool?'



» When your runner does this, it means you've messed up somewhere.



» "Farewell skateboard, thanks for those two seconds of fun."



» *Metro-Cross* man's impression of a crinkle-cut crisp wearing a crash helmet was the talk of the competition.

freeze the clock. Also littered around the tracks are useful springboards that will catapult your runner forward, and nifty skateboards, which will handily ignore the game's go-slow zones, but unfortunately, also live up to the reputation of being videogaming's most skittish power-up. True to form, negotiating a level on the skateboard is similar to steering a racehorse down the wrong lane of the M25 in the middle of rush hour. It's best avoided.

The graphics are big and chunky, the action's well animated and the cartoon style fits the bizarre premise like an orange glove. Speaking of which, the game's protagonist might be a shoo-in for the world's most ridiculously dressed game character – he's definitely the most carroty looking – but it's the unfortunate slapstick lifestyle, forced upon him every time a coin is slotted into the arcade cabinet that should really be the priority on his worry list.

The game is addictive yet unmercifully unforgiving. Throwing money at the Game-Over screen won't procure you a ticket to its completion, *Metro-Cross* has to be finished using a solitary credit. That's right, all of her wickedly taxing levels must be finished in one sitting, making it a real triathlon of dexterity, patience and stamina. The last few stages leave no room for error, with players required to hone the art of blue-can stomping to ensure that the insufficient time limit is kept on ice. It's here that you realise finishing the final few levels will depend on a strange balance of familiarity and skill, as you try to remember which pitfall is coming up next and build up those vital reserve-seconds for the final race.



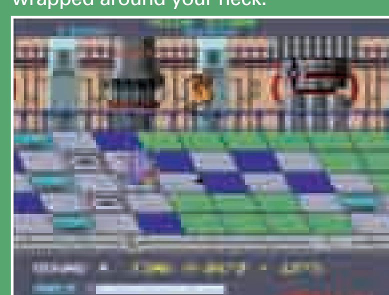
» Trying to stay airborne is a good strategy, especially when life's just one big minefield.

The frantic checkpoint dash, presented by *Metro-Cross*, has been integrated into many iconic games over the years. Legendary Sega game designer, Yu Suzuki, would often highlight the significance of 'time' in his work. *OutRun* went against its peers, leaving the conventional racing theme to wane at the starting grid and make way for multiple checkpoints. And *Space Harrier*, *Hang On* and *After Burner 2* also incorporated markers into their gameplay. Suzuki later toyed with the concept for his soap-opus, *Shenmue*, where checkpoints existed as morning, afternoon and evening, and rather than an authoritative role, they were used to subtly shepherd gamers through its unique '*free*' style gameplay.

There's no denying that *Metro-Cross* is a very strange beast, it's an oddity which, for its sheer arbitrariness, merits standing on top of the classic game podium. While *Track & Field* had that intense multiplayer pulling power inside the arcades, *Metro-Cross* grabbed gamers with its simple, yet tactile gameplay. To be proficient at *Metro-Cross* is a measure of a capable gamer. Realising you're finally improving as a talented Coke-can leaper, finishing one of its demanding tracks with a few extra milliseconds on the clock or inputting a rude word into its high-score table, in retribution for the game's jobsworth temperament, was like walking away with a piece of pure gaming gold wrapped around your neck.



» Even the giant Coke cans prove ineffective against the chin.



» Everything in the game looks too darn happy, even the springs celebrate when you step on them.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SPLATTERHOUSE 3
SEGA GENESIS
1993

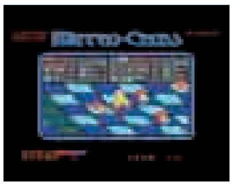
TEKKEN
ARCADE/PLAYSTATION
1994

TIME CRISIS
ARCADE/PLAYSTATION
1995



STADIUM ARCADIUM

Thanks to publisher US Gold, *Metro-Cross* later made appearances on a number of platforms, including the Famicon, Atari ST, Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad, with most of its ports well received by gamers and games magazines. *Your Sinclair* and *Crash* both gave it an admirable write-up, despite both, oddly referring to the game's protagonist as a roller-skater (well we can only guess that monochrome palettes were probably to blame for that). But the best version, by a country mile, was the amazing CPC version. It perfectly ported across the spark and the vibrant look of the arcade game, the annoyingly catchy, if not rudimentary, theme tune and somehow managed to make the runner look like a young Jimmy Savile now then, now then for fans of the arcade cab, that's certainly fixing it.



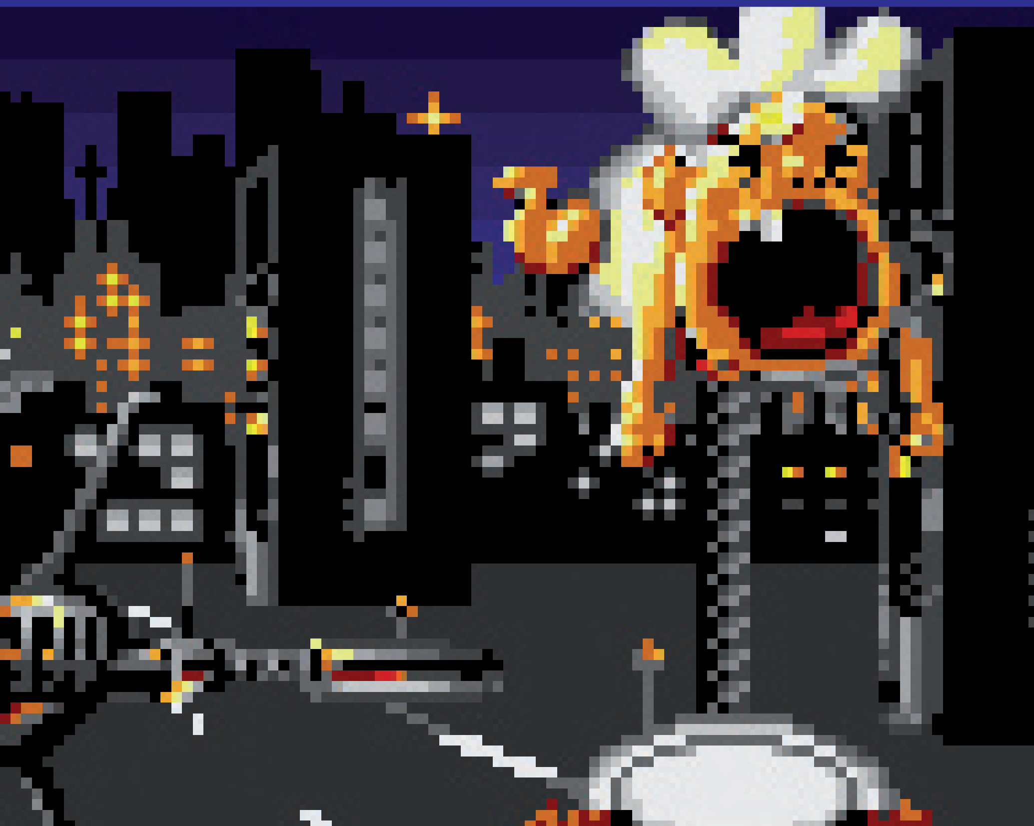


THE MAKING OF... BATMAN THE MOVIE

Regarded as one of the greatest film tie-ins of all time, Ocean Software's *Batman The Movie* was the icing on the cake of an incredibly prolific decade for the Manchester-based software house when the title was released at the close of the Eighties. Robert Mellor talks to Bill Harbison and Gary Bracey about helming one of the biggest games of the era

Released in the autumn of 1989 to coincide with the blockbuster movie on which it was based, Ocean's *Batman The Movie* became a huge hit across all home computer formats and was one of the first releases to truly take advantage of the Commodore Amiga's 16-bit capabilities. An enormous success both critically and commercially, the game won just about every magazine award going for all platforms and followed on from two prior Ocean Batman licences – 1986's isometric action-adventure *Batman*, along with 1988's comic-book flavoured *Batman The Caped Crusader*.

Sticking to the blueprint that Ocean had pioneered a year earlier on its record-smashing *RoboCop* licence, *Batman The Movie* puts players in charge of the eponymous hero and charges them with the task of traversing the perilous scenarios of Gotham City in five intricately designed sub-games that encompass platform sections, driving simulations and a panic-inducing puzzle. With slick coding by Mike Lamb, colourfully detailed graphics by Bill Harbison, Dawn Drake and John Palmer along with suitably atmospheric music and FX from Jon Dunn and Matthew Cannon, it was the Amiga version that impressed the most when the game debuted, leaving critics and buyers alike in awe that such an impressive piece of gaming software was possible outside of a dedicated arcade cabinet. Ocean Software already had an impressive track record with movie licences prior to *Batman*, as the company's former development director Gary Bracey





» A challenging start in the Axis Chemical Works.



» Using the ladders looks nice, but takes time.

"BY TAKING THE ARCADE ACTION FROM ROBOCOP AND MIXING IT WITH THE 3D DRIVING OF CHASE HQ, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT IT WAS GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL"
BILL HARBISON

explains: "Movies were my second love, after videogames. I used to get all the Trades and leaf through them trying to see if there were any up-and-coming titles that sounded interesting. Bear in mind this was way before the internet, so everything was on paper. Once we had established a good business case for the movie companies to license to us, then it was much easier as THEY came to US. It did get a little silly, though. I remember being offered the script for "*Mississippi Burning*"… not really suitable gaming material." With the licence acquired, a suitable team was assembled to tackle the project, including graphic artist Bill Harbison, who today recalls his fondness for the original DC comics and his thoughts on being involved with such a high-profile release: "I was a fan of Batman in my early teenage years. I think I was drawn towards that dark side of his character. I think I probably grew out of comics for a while until *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller. I fell in love with his art style and the story immediately. I didn't enjoy the first Batman movie as much. I think if it'd had a bigger budget to spend on better visual effects it would have improved greatly. The second movie was definitely the best. Thankfully, Gary didn't pressurise us too much. We knew the movie was blatantly stacked with hyperbole and we didn't initially buy into it. After the game and movie were released we could see that we were just a small cog in the Batman machine's quest for global domination."



» Traverse the perilous platforms with one simple swing.

The company's big movie licence of 1988 was, of course, *RoboCop*, which became the most lucrative home computer game of the era – and this was understandably a factor on the minds of all involved with *Batman The Movie*, as Bill divulges: "I think that because we were now working on more powerful computers in terms of speed and graphics, there was definitely a sense of making as big an improvement as possible to our original titles on 8-bit machines, whether it be *RoboCop* or *Chase HQ*. This was our first proper 16-bit title and we wanted it to be good. I think *Batman* was always going to be a re-skin of *RoboCop*. We had a big licence to work on and we had two teams that had produced two of the most innovative arcade games at that time. By taking the arcade action from *RoboCop* and mixing it with the 3D driving of *Chase HQ*, it was obvious that it was going to be successful." Gary himself, meanwhile, had been particularly close to the *RoboCop* licence of 1988 and explains its relationship and impact on the subsequent translation of *Batman* from film to game: "We had sublicensed the coin-op rights of *RoboCop* to Data East who made a great arcade game, so we pretty much copied that. *Batman The Movie* was designed and developed in-house. The design was a collaborative one between the programmers and artists who developed the game. I could only give verbal ideas though, as I can't



» Ocean's *Batman The Movie*.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **GENRE:** MOVIE LICENSE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £9.99 8-BIT, £24.99 16-BIT (ORIGINAL RRP) AROUND £10 TODAY

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

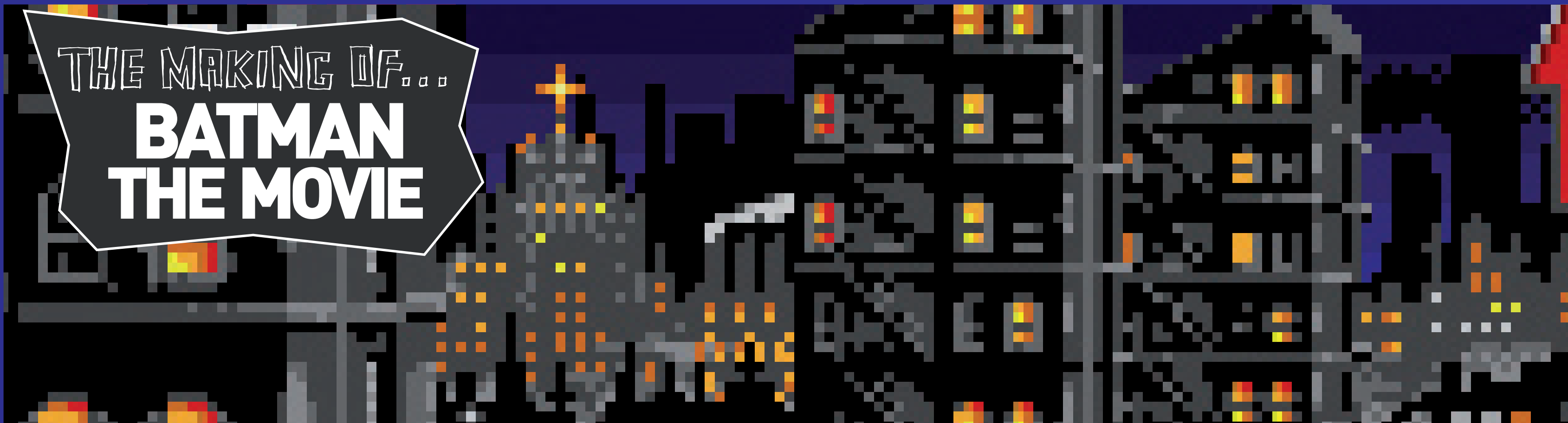
ROBOCOP
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

THE UNTOUCHABLES
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989



THE MAKING OF... BATMAN THE MOVIE



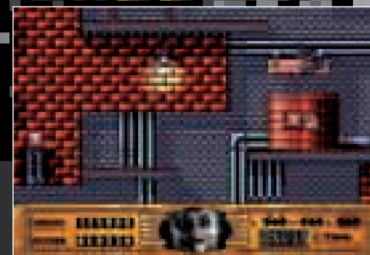




» Batman's medicine cupboard.



» Catch enemies off-guard with a fluid swing.



» Now who's laughing?

"WE HAD UNLIMITED ACCESS TO THE PINEWOOD STUDIO LOT WHERE THEY WERE FILMING BATMAN ALSO. THAT WAS GREAT FUN" GARY BRACEY

STILL GOING STRONG

While Ocean Software as a company may be long gone, fans will be pleased to hear that both Gary and Bill remain active in the scene in one way or another:

Harbison: I am lead artist at Rockpool Games Ltd (www.rockpoolgames.com) and for the past two years have been working on mobile game titles. Recently I have been working on some titles for Sega, which include *Sonic The Hedgehog*. I also helped out on a version of *Golden Axe*. The company was recently bought by Eidos which has brought even more exciting game opportunities our way which, unfortunately, I can't say too much about.

Bracey: I'm still involved within the periphery of the games biz – it's in my heart and it's hard to turn my back on it. Eight years ago, I formed a company called Digimask (www.digimask.com) with the idea of being able to put "you" graphically within the games. It's a personalisation technology which automatically generates a fully animated 3D model of your head from two photographs, allowing you to be a character in the game. It's available for PC and Xbox 360 at the moment (*Rainbow Six Vegas* used it) and you can also catch it being used to promote the new *Pirates Of The Caribbean* movie (http://myspace.com/atworldsend). You can also relive the heady pinnacles of the Mancunian software giant by visiting The Ocean Experience at www.theoceanexperience.co.uk.

draw for toffee and the guys we had in-house were incredibly talented anyway. We did have many brainstorming sessions where everyone threw an idea or two into the pot. Just abstract concepts that were ultimately compiled into a logical and exciting format (usually by the artists). I don't think the 'design by committee' process would work these days as the designs need to be much more detailed and planned. In those days, the levels were roughly storyboarded for visual reference, but the specific layout/game play elements were figured out as we went along."

A perhaps surprising duo of revelations in the creation of the game were the level of studio involvement on behalf of Warner Brothers and the amount of access the Mancunian software house was granted with regards to the big-budget production. Working on such a high-profile title obviously comes with its pressures and headaches, but it can also come with fringe-benefits to the budding film fan; "We were allowed to review some of the footage during the shoot, but we were never sent such things," Gary Bracey reveals. "If we wanted to see something we had to travel to Pinewood, and Tim Burton was pretty cool about giving us access. However, we were based in Manchester remember, so we didn't make the trip too frequently. They were justifiably paranoid about any advance visual material being leaked to the press and so no photos were sent out to us, other than materials that had been generally cleared for use anyhow. They were extremely diligent with their approvals process (for 'extremely diligent', read 'anal'). We had an early submission rejected as 'Batman's ears are too long' (by about one pixel). We had unlimited access to the Pinewood Studio lot where they were filming Batman also. That was great fun. I remember sitting in the Batmobile and walking around Gotham City." Bill Harbison also remembers the high-priority clearance they had while working on the release, going on to explain how this was ultimately translated to the game itself: "During the production of the game we were sent storyboards of some of the movie's action sequences and some photographs from Warner Brothers. These were used to create the graphical style for the arcade levels and character sprites along with the storyline and flow of the game. The full screen bitmaps were hand-drawn by Jon Palmer from photographic reference and the portraits of the Joker and Batman on the utility belt were hand-drawn by me. The game was basically created from the reference material that we had and compressed into the deadline we were given. If we were given reference material for other locations in the movie I'm sure they would have been incorporated into the game. One of the reasons for having the driving levels in the game was because we weren't given enough material to create a complete action arcade game and something was needed to fill that void."

In an apt twist of fate, it was the necessity for the inclusion of the 3D simulation levels (Batmobile and Batwing) that turned out to be the game's ace in the hole, with them proving the most applauded and impressive facets of the Amiga version – notably more impressive than the majority of contemporary dedicated driving/flight simulation games. Designing these sections, however, was not without its roadblocks: "Since the Amiga and Atari ST had no hardware scaling functions I had to create about



» Cruisin' in the Batmobile.

THE MAKING OF: BATMAN THE MOVIE



» 'A good place to test my utility belt works', thought Batman.



» "What are you laughing at?"

eight versions of all the roadside objects and vehicles to give the impression that they were flying towards the camera," Bill Harbison confesses. "As far as I know the road was calculated and rendered in a similar way to how it was done on *Chase HQ*, crossing this over to a more powerful platform didn't seem too taxing for Jon. The only addition we made was to have a Batrope eject from either side of the vehicle to allow the player to go around tight corners into other streets." Considering his position in Ocean as a company director, Gary Bracey too had a surprising and admirable quotient of involvement in the implementation of these sub-games: "With that one, I did have a little input myself and originally mooted the 3D Batmobile section, using the Batarang 'anchors' around the lampposts to make quick turns."

The studio's understandable stance on not leaking out any advance images or promotional material for the film, however, was unquestionably a thorn in Bill Harbison's side with relation to designing the main sprites: "When it came to reference material for the Batmobile and Batwing, they were reluctant to give us any pictures of the vehicles to work with which as you can imagine was infuriating for me trying to draw the sprites. It wasn't until about a week before my deadline and with several redraws under my utility belt, that I discovered in a local toy shop a small Batmobile toy from the movie. It was just what I needed to complete the project but because it was so rushed towards the end, I wasn't satisfied with the resulting sprites. If I'd had longer to work on them I would have created a better quality Batmobile."

Upon it's completion, the game comprised five levels that faithfully represented all the major scenes and plot points from the multi-million dollar film. Platform action was present with the book-ending sections of the toxic-infested Axis Chemical Works Factory and the labyrinthine construction of Gotham City cathedral, with artificially intelligent CGI villains. The 3D Batmobile and Batwing sections were there in all their glory while a mid-game visit to the Batcave to deduce The Joker's deadly Smilex combination rounded out proceedings. On release the game was met with plaudits from all corners with 8-bit formats proving unbelievably diverse and fun to play, while the 16-bit versions (particularly the Amiga port) garnered respect for being truly state-of-the-art home computer games that excelled in graphics, sound and playability and completely astounded with cinematic presentation. Looking back, Gary Bracey remains rightfully proud of what Ocean achieved with *Batman The Movie*: "It was one of my "babies". I had been involved in every aspect from the licensing, to the conception, to the execution and had probably been closer to that particular game than any other since *RoboCop*. Once again, I really do need to stress that it was all down to the amazing talent of our in-house people. Apart from the professional satisfaction of being involved, as a movie-fan it was incredible having access to the sets, locations, costumes, actors and even footage of the film in production. I think I pinched myself once or twice back then. After that, it became the norm with most of the movies and I guess I got a little blasé about it." Bill Harbison, too, professes his satisfaction with the project, closing by pointing out the game's impact and legacy: "After a holiday we came back to work on our next project. Once you finish a game you pretty much forget about it and are more interested in the next one. But *Batman* will always hold a special place in my heart as it was my first 16-bit title and, although we didn't see it at the time, it was a huge game licence and quite an influential product."



» The many face's of The Joker.



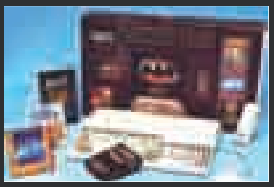
» "See that thing on my belt? Grab it! Whatever you do, don't let go."



» The 3D Batwing section.

HOLY PACK-INS, BATMAN!

Launched in October 1989 at £399 and available for nearly a full 12 months, David Pleasance's Amiga A500 Batman Pack became one of the most successful hardware/software bundles of all time and topped many a child's Christmas list for that year. Boasting the machine itself, the requisite copy of *Batman The Movie*, Ocean's stellar conversion of Taito's *The New Zealand Story* and a plethora of other goodies, the collection was a phenomenal success in the European market and considerably boosted the 16-bit Commodore's user base:
Bracey: It was a great tie-in. I remember being involved in the presentations to Commodore for the Amiga Batman Pack as well as numerous press presentations throughout Europe. As it turned out, they attributed a large part of the Amiga's European success to that pack. I didn't personally get involved in too much of the general marketing, but obviously made sure I attended all the parties. Commodore loved us back then!
Harbison: Someone made a lot of money out of that deal, and it certainly wasn't us.



遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

AND THERE WAS YOU THINKING RADIANT SILVERGUN WAS THE BEST EVER SATURN SHOOTER…

SOUKYUGURENTAI

It may not be the most well known shmup available for the Sega Saturn, thanks to a certain Treasure-developed title, but Soukyugurentai is undoubtedly one of the best. Sean Smith takes a closer look at this Nippon-only stunner…

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

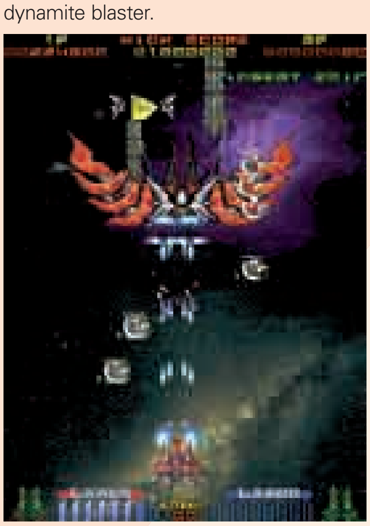
» **DEVELOPER:** 8ING/RAIZING

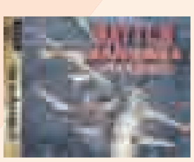
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SATURN

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30

» **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:**

Galactic Attack
It can be quite hard to track down now, but if you can find it then *Galactic Attack* is a worthy addition to your collection. Known as *Layer Section* in Japan (and *Rayforce* in Japanese arcades) *Galactic Attack* features a similar lock-on system to *Soukyugurentai* and is another dynamite blaster.





Interesting fact
Electronic Arts is the last company you'd think of when naming publishers of hardcore shooters, but that's exactly what happened in the mid-Nineties. As well as publishing the stupendously good *Soukyugurentai*, the American giant also looked after the brilliant *Battle Garegga*.



» It will take some deft stick-work to avoid the giant clown, looming into view nose-first.

メガ駆動機構

The 32-bit era was a fantastic time if you were a) a fan of 2D shooters, or b) living in Japan or able to import. Yes – sadly us westerners were too busy lapping up all of the glitzy 3D fare, meaning that save for a handful of releases, our borders were nary troubled by the many beautiful creations from Japan – like *Soukyugurentai*. Translated into English as *Blue Heavens Red Lotus Team*, *Souky*, as it is affectionately known by fans, is undoubtedly one of the best reasons to own a Sega Saturn, and one of the finest vertically scrolling blasters of all time.

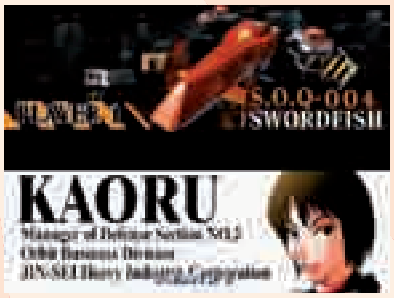
8ing/Raizing may be more famous these days for their *Naruto* tie-ins, but for seven glorious years from 1993, the *Toaplan*-offshoot mavericks delivered eight classic shmups. In 1996, following the acclaimed bullet hell of *Battle Garegga*, Raizing got to work using Sega's arcade hardware of the time – the S-TV Titan board, which incorporated a cartridge system and was virtually identical to the innards of a Saturn. *Soukyugurentai* was released initially in Japan but also received a very limited US release in arcade form, where the name was changed to *Terra Diver.* While a traditional vertical effort at heart, *Souky* features, much like Capcom's *Giga Wing*, a widescreen display – meaning that the entire playing area is used horizontally rather than flipping the monitor or TV screen for TATE mode. And my oh my, Raizing packed every inch of the screen with beautiful 3D-stroke-2D backgrounds, wonderful pre-rendered sprites



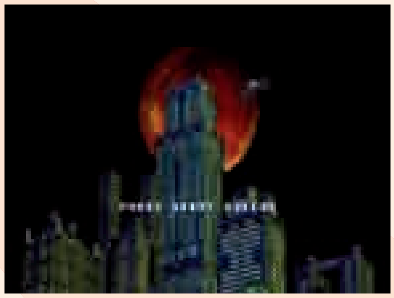
» Preparing to blast off and kick some ass!

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

N PROMISE



» Kaoru: back on the market after her divorce, lads – get in there!


» Questionable piloting in the attract mode.

PSX-TRAS

It wasn't just the Saturn that got the best shooters, oh no siree. In the case of *Soukyugurentai*, the PlayStation got in on the act too, receiving a highly commendable arcade conversion with an extra yellow ship to choose and some unnecessary FMV sequences. Gameplay is essentially the same but is hampered with more slowdown than the Saturn and slightly more blocky graphics. It is also generally much more expensive to hunt down. The Saturn also received a tweaked version of *Souky* itself. *Soukyugurentai Otokoyo* fixed a problem that made the game glitch when using an Action Replay cartidge, and added support for the analogue controller and a demo of *Battle Garegga*. It is identified in the wild by slightly different boxart.

and incredible scrolling, scaling and rotation effects that create the perfect setting for the finely balanced gameplay on offer. The scenery takes in crumbling, post-apocalyptic cities, and journeys through the clouds and through space itself – each location looking completely ace.

Rather unusually, *Souky* dispenses with the standard "humans vs aliens" premise, instead the shooty fun is set to the backdrop of a complex socio-economic confrontation between rival mega-corporations attempting to triumph over one another somewhere near Mars. You take control of the SOQ Red Lotus Team – a crack trio of pilots who include within their number, a middle manager going through a messy divorce, a moody young man with family issues, and a quarrelsome yet compassionate girl with tasty combat skills. Each pilot has access to a different ship, each with shmup-standard smart bombs, but different attributes in terms of speed and fire pattern. The red Toryu (Dragon) fires straight and diagonally in tandem. The Shien (Purple Lightning) has a spread gun and mini homing missiles, while the mean, green Houga (Fang) serves up heavy, concentrated fire and dual directional attacks. What ties them all together, though, is the NALS (Non-blind spot All range Laser System).

NALS plays a huge part in gameplay. Taking cues from predecessors such as Taito's *Raystorm/Rayforce*, holding down the main fire/attack button will send forth a lock-on laser-web. This is shaped as a cone or semi-circle depending on which ship you have selected – but regardless of shape, it will rather impressively destroy all the enemies it locks onto after the button is released. This gameplay mechanic creates a wonderful dilemma over whether you go all out gung-ho attack with your standard blaster, or play tactically to encompass as many baddies as possible in your fiery net of destruction. Each ship has a choice of two different lock-on weapons using this laser-web technique, allowing you to concentrate on one particular enemy or send out homing lasers or other such incendiary projectiles to batter all and sundry. It all feels very satisfying. In addition to the brilliant lock-on system, collectable powerups within the play field will boost your standard firepower as you rip through waves of enemies, all accompanied by a banging Hitoshi "*Final Fantasy XII*" Sakimoto techno/orchestral crossover soundtrack, that is begging to be turned up loud on account of some tremendous sounding bass.


» *Terra Diver* – very rare in the wild, same classic gameplay.

It could be said that *Soukyugurentai* is not an easy game. It sneakily lures you in with a relatively easy first level, then ramps up the difficulty with some insane bosses and situations where only the most precise and skilful players will survive without pumping the start button or slamming more coinage into the slot, should you be playing the game in its natural arcade habitat. It is incredibly addictive and compulsive, and has numerous ways you can approach gameplay to maximise your score. For example, not using any of your allocated smart bombs may seem like idiocy – but keeping your full allocation intact means that collecting any subsequent bombs from downed enemies gives you a kick-ass score multiplier. Some equally snooker-loopy players choose to play through the game using only the web and not the standard gun to progress. Whatever floats your boat – but let's face it – unless you are a naturally gifted shmup wunderkind (much like our esteemed editor), it will be a good while before you can claim to have "one Credit" honours on this bad boy.

If you happen to own an NTSC Saturn console or have a means of playing imports, we here at **Retro Gamer** are pleased to report that it is exceedingly easy to pick up the excellent, near arcade-perfect Saturn conversion for the cost of a budget current-gen title. Arriving in 1997, the game saw the light in Japan only, despite being published by Electronic Arts, and now sits deservedly alongside the likes of *Radiant Silvergun*, *DoDonPachi* and *Layer Section* in the pantheon of classic shooters for Sega's ill-fated 32-bitter, and you really can't get a higher recommendation than that.

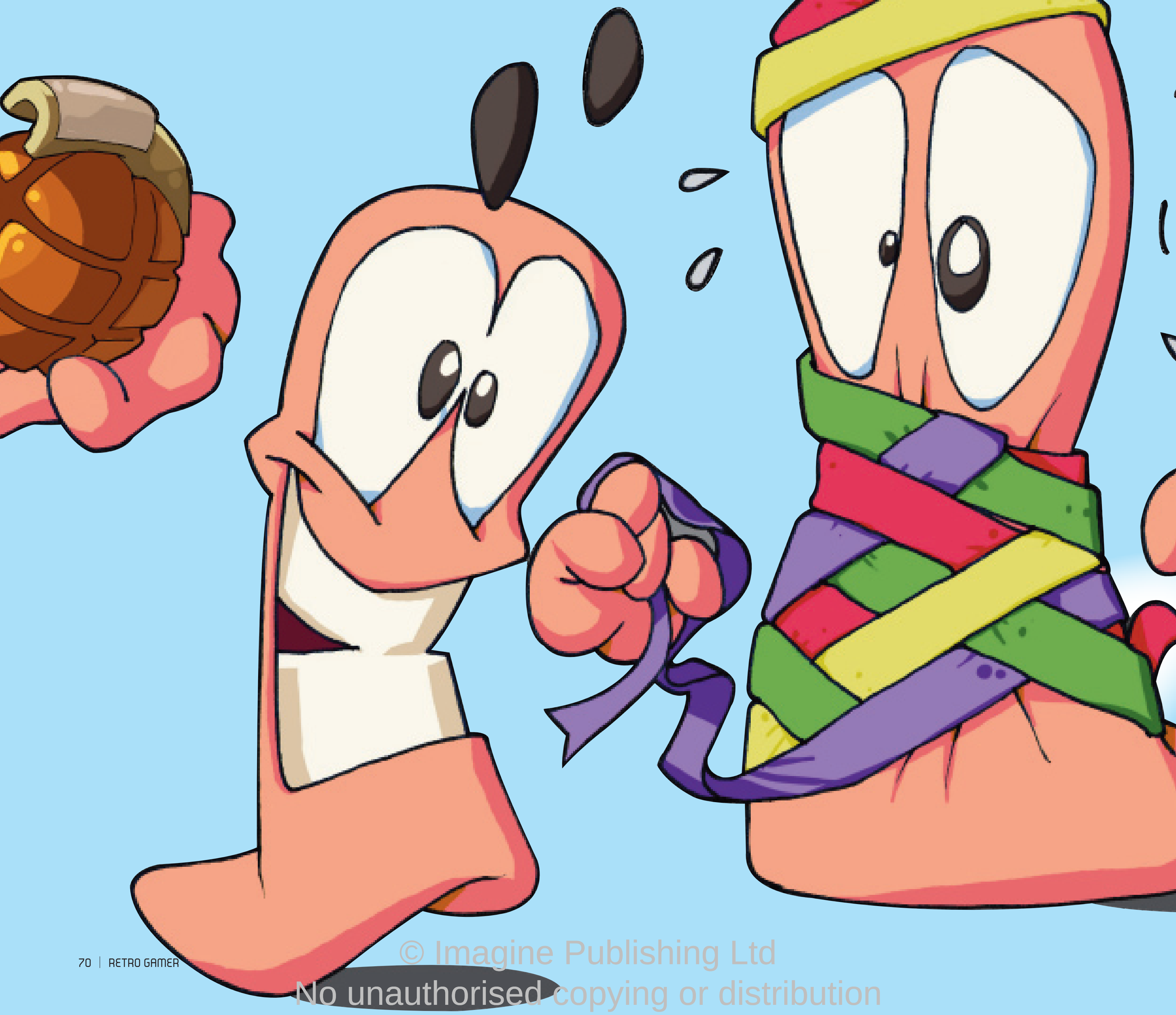

» Taking down one of the huge bosses.


» The pre-rendered settings are awesome.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

WORMS







THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

WORMS

1995-2007

ON THE VERGE OF THE RELEASE OF ITS SEVENTEENTH WORMS GAME TO DATE, TEAM17 KINDLY STOPPED BY TO CHAT WITH RETRO GAMER ABOUT THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE SERIES. ASHLEY DAY, A SELF-CONFESSED WORMAHOLIC, OPENS THE CAN…

Dedicated Retro Gamer readers may remember that Andy Davidson, creator of the original *Worms* game, revealed the origins of the series way back in issue 23. But what of the development house that believed in Davidson's project enough to develop it into one of the biggest franchises in UK gaming history? That company was Team17, a Wakefield-based studio more famous for the likes of *Alien Breed* and *Superfrog* before it became synonymous with *Worms*.

As has now become the stuff of gaming legend, Team17 first encountered *Worms* in September 1994 at the European Computer Trade Show. A 21-year-old Davidson was demoing what was then known as *Total Wormage*. Also at the show was Team17 director Martyn Brown. "I think that Andy did a great job of selling the game really; he spoke with a refreshing energy and passion about the game. It was fairly rudimentary visually and technically, but it was clear in a few minutes that there was something about it, something that would really appeal. I liked it a ton, although I obviously never considered at that point that it would ever develop into a world-renowned franchise; it was 1994 and the idea of videogame franchises was still quite rare." Davidson and Team17 soon joined forces, working together to finish *Worms*. "When Andy came in house", continues Brown, "the game was perhaps something like 60 per cent complete and obviously it's a game that begs suggestions and neat touches. Many of these were discussed during its development here and I'd like to think that the people playing the game were hugely contributory in terms of features and design, and that Andy took a lot of that on board. If I'm honest, I don't feel that they're always hugely acknowledged, but there you go."

Team17 originally intended to release *Worms* at a budget price, although that idea didn't last very long once the world began to realise just how special the game was. "The original plan was to release the game on our highly successful lower-price-point range of Amiga titles", confirms Brown. "However, the more we played it, the more interest it got, the more time and money went into honing it and so on. Once Ocean Software got involved, a huge marketing budget was applied (as well as console conversions) and the price simply couldn't stay as a budget game when £1 million was spent in marketing." That £1 million was money well spent, as *Worms* went on to achieve enormous critical and commercial success. Game magazines and players alike raved about brilliant multiplayer mechanics as well as the zany humour, as the title went on to sell an incredible number of copies and garnered many industry awards.

Worms changed the fate of both Davidson and Team17 forever. A smart contractual

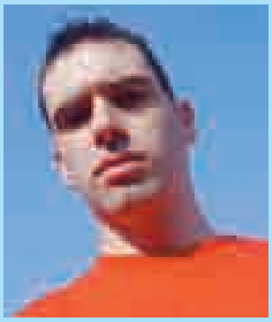


» *Team17's* logo along with a tooled-up worm.



"A HUGE MARKETING BUDGET WAS APPLIED… THE PRICE SIMPLY COULDN'T STAY AS A BUDGET GAME WHEN £1 MILLION WAS SPENT IN MARKETING" MARTYN BROWN





» Andy Davidson, the original creator of *Worms*, left Team17 during the development of *Worms Armageddon*.



» Martyn Brown is head of Team17 and has been involved with the *Worms* series from the very first game.

agreement between the pair ensured that Davidson could walk away from the franchise at any time, safe in the knowledge that he could live off the sales royalties of the original game as well as any future sequels, while Team17 retained the rights to the property and could produce as many follow-ups as it wished – an agreement that has arguably kept the developer afloat during a time when so many others have fallen by the wayside.

That commercial success didn't come about by accident though. In 1995 the Amiga computer, for which *Worms* was first designed, suffered a rapidly declining user base; it was clear that if *Worms* was to make a global impact it would have to be released on multiple formats – presumably quite a challenge for a studio that had been Amiga-only for the previous four years. "We had to adopt a very steep learning curve, that's true", admits Brown. "We were fortunate to have some very capable people around who attacked the development problems we had very wisely, enabling us to cross-platform develop the new code without too much pain. Some of the other formats (SNES, Game Boy and Mega Drive) were all done out of house since we just didn't have the skills or capacity to develop those ourselves."

Despite the difficulties in adjusting to multiformat development, almost all of the *Worms* conversions were near identical to the Amiga original, except for the Game Boy version which understandably struggled to replicate the big-screen experience. *Worms* was a huge hit across its ten different hardware formats and soon became a favourite for gamers, not just in the UK but all over the world, and despite earlier triumphs, the phenomenal success of *Worms* was not lost on the staff at Team17. Brown explains exactly how the team felt when the impact of *Worms*' accomplishments hit them. "I think it's fair to say that it was a mixture of jubilation, shellshock and sheer relief that something we'd passionately believed in beat the doubters and did the business. More importantly, players loved it, we scooped the BBC One Viewers' Award on *Live & Kicking* – the kids voted for it and that meant the world. We'd had a lot of commercial success prior to *Worms* (especially around 1992-1994) and we'd perhaps got a little used to that (without being too smug) but this was success on an unprecedented scale."

With all that success a sequel to *Worms* was an inevitability, although, shockingly, the *Worms* franchise was about to explode with all the power of a Holy Hand Grenade as Team17 readied not one but three follow-ups to the original Amiga title. Shortly after the release of the first *Worms* game, Team17 would release *Worms Reinforcements*, a PC-only expansion pack, while 1997 would see *Worms: Directors Cut* hit the Amiga and a full-blown sequel debut on PC. It was around this time that Kelvin Aston, now lead producer on *Worms: Open Warfare 2*, joined Team17. "*Worms Reinforcements* on PC was my first *Worms* title as QA. It was trial by fire since the QA guys from *Worms 1* showed me no mercy during multiplayer testing", he says. "My first lead QA role was on *Worms: Director's Cut* where I got to work very closely with Andy Davidson and Paul Kilburn [producer], which was a very exciting process and it felt great to be sitting around the Amiga while people were throwing ideas around for new weapons, modes and cheat codes. My role throughout this time was to basically play the game to death, making sure that I'd done everything the end user would do, and more, directly passing bugs across to Andy and Paul for them to deal with. During that time I got to see just how truly original ideas for a game come to fruition, and it was a period I look back on very fondly." An ascendance from game testing to designing a full game may not seem like a natural transition to the outside observer but, as Kelvin explains, the experience gained in those early years was invaluable to the role he plays today. "*Worms* is a game with a vast depth of mechanics, rules and little tweak settings which need to be understood in order to either design or



ABORTED ARSENAL

Be it the Super Sheep, the Concrete Donkey or some other crazy contraption, everyone has their favourite *Worms* weapon. But what of those that never made it into the final games? "Some were dropped last minute, like the Bible weapon, for example, and some were changed, like the CS nerve agent which became a skunk", reveals Martyn Brown. "In the earlier days, the game bordered on black/dark humour and over the years that's been sanitised to a certain extent, mostly because of the way the videogame market, and the demands put upon it by publishing activities in wide geographical territories have matured. That's a bit of a mouthful and it basically means we are told not to upset lots of people these days."

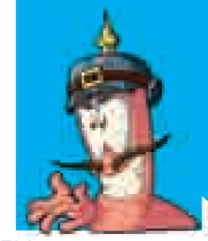


» The look of the worms has changed dramatically from semi-realistic to comical in the last 12 years.





» Two original, and eventually abandoned, concepts for *Worms 3D*'s box art.

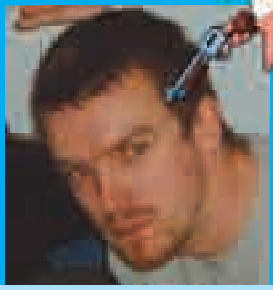


DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN...



YOU FIRST BLEW UP A SHEEP?
Whether your first game of *Worms* was on Xbox Live or on the Amiga, we're sure you can remember the thrill of sending a little woolly mammal to its fiery doom, all in the name of blowing up a group of your best mate's worms.





» Kelvin Aston, lead producer on *Worms: Open Warfare 2*.



» Kevin Carthew, lead designer on *Worms: Open Warfare 2*.





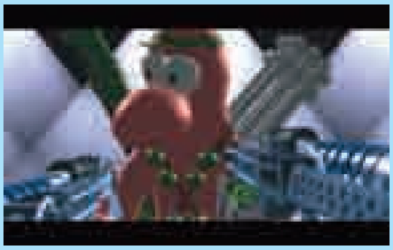
» A risqué advertisement for the French release of *Worms*.

produce the next one in the series. Being in QA allows you to work closely with the game and the team behind it so you're fully aware of why things are like they are. Some would say to an anorak level – and they'd be right."

It was also around this time that Davidson's control of the franchise began to wane, as Brown recalls. "Andy was given free rein to continue working on his *Director's Cut* edition of the game for the AGA chipset (more memory and possibilities, plus some features he didn't have time to put in the original), and some of these ideas were then taken into *Worms 2* and also, later, *Worms Armageddon*, but the *Worms 2* and *Armageddon* development teams were quite separate [from *Director's Cut*] and there were not really any shared design goals. Andy had quite a bit of input into the sequel, *Worms 2*, but much less so in *Armageddon*." The differences between *Worms: Director's Cut* and *Worms 2* were obvious from the start, not only because of the discrepancy in in-game features but also because of the radical new graphical style that *Worms 2* adopted. "The first game's visuals were born much through necessity and function rather than design", explains Brown. "For the second game we had four times the resolution and wished to represent the worms with a much more vivid, detailed and smooth animation while keeping the game funny and hugely playable. The original game had been a huge success to a very wide demographic: non gender or age specific, but mostly 10-24 year olds, which is a huge market. Because of the additional detail offered, we decided on a fairly neutral style, in terms of the age appeal of the cartoon characters, that wouldn't look too young or too adult. Looking back, I'm happy with the choice we made and we've retained the visual style pretty much for the last seven to eight years after going through a period when consistency of visuals was a huge issue for us in box art, if nothing else."

Following *Worms 2* were two further sequels, *Worms Armageddon* and *Worms World Party*, which made minor visual improvements but tweaked the mechanics of the game to near perfection, adding wildly imaginative weapons and endless customisation options, while the online components of the series were also constructed. Kevin Carthew, lead designer on *Worms: Open Warfare 2*, began his career on *Worms Armageddon* and was well placed to see how Team17's online developments have evolved over the years. "Proper online server-based play came first with *Worms 2*", he says. "It had an IRC-style. lobby interface to allow players to chat to one another and was very popular. I think people to this day still play *Worms 2* online. It was largely thanks to the popularity of *Worms 2* online that we still have a strong community following the series today. It's hard to say when the online side of the game was 'perfected' because there is always room for improvement and it's a very difficult thing to get right. *Worms Armageddon* introduced 'WormNET' and online rankings – it was a definite improvement over *Worms 2*."

Despite the improvements of each new game, many were beginning to question just



» The CGI intro sequence to the first *Worms* had people assuming that *Worms 3D* was possible as early as 1995. It wasn't.



» A wireframe worm model compared to its two-dimensional hand-drawn concept art.



» The ability to create custom levels in the original *Worms* led to several unofficial compilations, packed with user-created maps.

THE DESIGNER'S CHOICE

We all have our favourite versions of *Worms* but what do the people behind the series prefer? Kevin Carthew says: "I'm torn between *Worms World Party* and *Worms: Open Warfare 2*. I've had some amazing times playing *Worms World Party* on the LAN here at Team17, real grudge match battles, lots of memorable moments – the kind of stuff you're talking about in the canteen five years afterwards. However, *Worms: Open Warfare 2* is the new boy in town and is feature packed. The game contains a lot of the things the community has been asking for, like completely original ideas, and is a more than worthy addition to the series." Kelvin Aston comments: "For me *Worms: DC* will always have a special place in my heart, although I must admit that I've played *Worms Armageddon* much more than any other game online. This all looks likely to change with *Open Warfare 2* though: this new one really is a monster, not just in the insane amount of content and customisation but also in the way it looks and plays too."

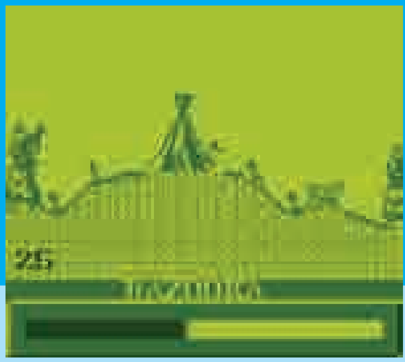
THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

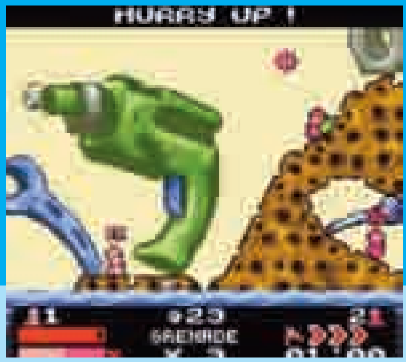


"I GOT TO SEE JUST HOW TRULY ORIGINAL IDEAS FOR A GAME COME TO FRUITION, AND IT WAS A PERIOD I LOOK BACK ON VERY FONDLY" KELVIN ASTON

WORMS KART ANYONE?

From Retro Gamer's *Worms* family tree it's clear that Team17 hasn't been shy about throwing its worms into other genres. Pinball and golf have featured, but the oddest of all was never released. Martyn Brown explains, "*Worms Battle Rally* was kind of like a deathmatch frag-fest… with worms in various vehicles, with weapons and loony environments… It was canned when *Worms 3D* was signed since the publisher at the time felt it wasn't for their portfolio. Ironically, the initial *Worms 3D* publisher decided to pull out of the project and we had to get the title re-signed. By this time, *WBR* had been parked for good."

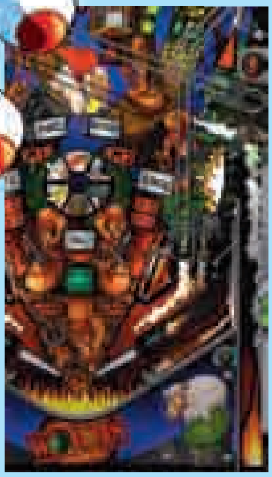




» Early handheld *Worms* games paled in comparison to its console brethren. Only recently have the portables received *Worms* titles to be proud of.



» *Worms World Party* was due to appear on Gizmondo but never materialised during the console's short lifespan. All that remains is this pack shot.



» The full table layout from *Worms Pinball* in all its glory.

how many more times Team17 could release another incremental update of the same game. A couple of attempts were made to spin the *Worms* franchise off into other genres, such as *Worms Pinball* and the puzzle game *Worms Blast*, but what most fans really expected, considering recent advances in technology, was a fully three-dimensional update of Worms.

Unknown to most of the gaming public, Team17 had been working on transporting *Worms* into the third dimension for many years before *Worms 3D*'s eventual 2003 release. "We tried a number of different approaches early on", reveals Brown, "but few really got the deformable landscape element right. We could have just done a simple height map approach, like *Hogs Of War* but we were determined to produce something that really was the 2D game in three dimensions." After years of experimentation, Team17 eventually got the formula right. Using a combination of polygons and voxels (basically 3D pixels) the *Worms 3D* team was able to create a purpose-built engine that would allow the game to play out just like its 2D ancestors, with every explosion causing part of the terrain to be blown away. Carthew explains, "In a game with non-deformable objects you can render flat surfaces and low amounts of detail in general with few polygon faces, but in the 3D versions of *Worms*, extra faces are included in the surfaces of material so that when the landscape is hit the faces can be removed and the objects appear to deform."

The new engine was a technological breakthrough. At the time, few games, if any had managed to create a true deformable landscape in 3D. The first-person shooter *Red Faction* had claimed to do so two years earlier but had, in reality, featured heavily restricted deformations that only happened in very specific, pre-programmed places. Only recently have other games come close to achieving what *Worms 3D* did. LucasArts' *Fracture* has received a wealth of pre-release hype in recent months, while many seem to have forgotten the pioneering work of Team17.

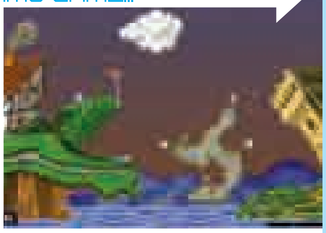
Sadly, despite the fact that the team managed to recreate the brilliance of the original *Worms* in a revolutionary 3D engine, the specialist press and the majority of the gaming public failed to enjoy the new games as much as they had the 2D originals. In 2005 the team took another crack at the 3D whip with *Worms 4: Mayhem*, which featured a greatly enhanced single-player mode, tweaked gameplay, huge customisation options and online play on consoles. Yet again, however, the general reaction to the game, other than that of the die-hard fans, was one of disappointment. "I thought the 3D games were great and with both *Worms 3D* and *Worms 4: Mayhem* I felt all involved had a right to be genuinely proud of what they had achieved", states Carthew. "*Worms 4* in particular was a very polished game and I have to say I was disappointed with the reviews the game received. It was a hard task taking the game into 3D. Most people look on *Worms* as a very straightforward and simple game but it has a lot of complexities; it has many rules and interactions brought about by the high number of weapons and items found in the game. Also, taking the games into 3D actually made them harder to play, especially for the newcomer. This became starkly obvious to me when I first took a copy of the release version home and let my housemates loose on it. Just explaining to a friend why they might call in an Air Strike, and even more so how they'd go about doing this was a real task. It was made so much harder by having to manipulate the game's camera in 3D space; something gamers such as myself take for granted but non-gamers can find cumbersome. In short, the 3D games retained all the hallmarks of what makes *Worms* the game it is, but I think the extra dimension added extra complexity that people weren't always so willing to take the time to overcome."

It's little surprise, then, that following such reactions Team17 has returned *Worms* to its cherished 2D roots. *Worms: Open Warfare* and its sequel have finally given handhelds the definitive *Worms* game they've been lacking since 1995, while *Worms* for Xbox Live Arcade has become not just one of the most-played Live Arcade games but also one of the most-played Xbox 360 games full stop. Proof, if any were needed, that the old ideas are often the best.



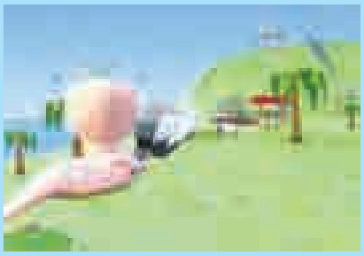
» A rare screenshot from *Total Wormage*, the game that eventually became *Worms*.

IF YOU PLAY ONE WORMS GAME… PLAY THIS…



WORMS WORLD PARTY – MULTIFORMAT

We're tempted to go for *Worms: The Director's Cut* for sentimental reasons but with only around 4,000 copies ever made, it's almost pointless to recommend. Instead, we'll go for *Worms World Party*. Still arguably the definitive version after all these years, *World Party* has it all. There's a fantastic online mode, tons of single-player missions and around 65 in-game weapons and items. Some may call it overwhelming. We prefer to use the word 'comprehensive.'







» Three prototype shots for what would eventually become *Worms 3D*. The first was a mock-up made by Microprose to tempt Team17 into making the game as early as 1998. Second, a height-mapped prototype, created by Team17's Alaric Binney in 2000. Finally, a deformable prototype, coded by Andy Clitheroe, the programmer behind *Alien Breed 3D*.

WORMS FAMILY TREE

WORMS

System: Various
Year Released: 1995

This is the game that propelled Team17 into the big league of UK developers, and made creator Andy Davidson a millionaire. *Worms* has since been surpassed by its superior sequels but the backbone of the gameplay is still there to see.



WORMS REINFORCEMENTS

System: PC
Year Released: 1995

Exclusively for PC, *Reinforcements* added a single-player campaign to the original and brought the PC version in line with the Amiga title by adding custom levels and voices.



WORMS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

System: Amiga 1200/4000
Year Released: 1997

Team17's final Amiga game was a salute to fans, and a special project for Andy Davidson. Many of the features that defined later *Worms* games made their debuts here.



WORMS 2

System: PC
Year Released: 1997

The first overhaul of the *Worms* franchise, this PC-exclusive sequel featured a new graphical style that was more cartoony than the original games. *Worms 2*'s biggest asset was the huge number of weapons and wealth of customisation options.



WORMS ARMAGEDDON

System: Various
Year Released: 1999

Originally planned as an expansion to *Worms 2*, *Armageddon*'s extra weapons, single-player missions and online system made it more eligible as a standalone game.



WORMS PINBALL

System: PlayStation
Year Released: 2000

A port of PC's *Addiction Pinball*, *Worms Pinball* is exactly the same but with a different name for marketing reasons. It plays a fairly decent game of pinball and features tables based on *Worms* and *World Rally Fever*.



WORMS WORLD PARTY

System: Various
Year Released: 2001

Armageddon was due to be the final 2D *Worms* until Sega approached Team17 and asked them to make an online version for Dreamcast. Its best new feature was the 'Wormpot.'



ONLINEWORMS

System: PC
Year Released: 2001

This free download-only PC game is a Korean-exclusive version of *Worms 2*, designed specifically for online play. Aside from a few changes to the graphical user interface and some new background themes, little is known about this oddity.



WORMS BLAST

System: Various
Year Released: 2002

The second diversion from the traditional *Worms* formula saw the pink wrigglers put their destructive powers to use in an action-puzzle game. Playable characters include the worms themselves, Old Woman, the Sheep and Team17's Superfrog.



WORMS WORLD PARTY AQUA

System: PC
Year Released: 2002

Another Korean online game, *Worms World Party Aqua* has a more cartoony visual style as well as another redesigned GUI and a few more exclusive background themes.



WORMS 3D

System: Various
Year Released: 2003

The second major overhaul to the series, *Worms 3D*, was harshly criticised on release, but is actually a very good *Worms* game once you get used to the extra dimension. *Worms 3D* is most notable for its fully deformable 3D environments.



WORMS FORTS: UNDER SIEGE

System: Various
Year Released: 2004

Although using the 3D engine, *Forts: Under Siege* actually plays differently. Like a strategy game, the idea is to build up fortresses and conquer land while blowing the crap out of each other.



WORMS GOLF

System: Mobile
Year Released: 2004

Most of the mobile phone *Worms* games are derivative of the PC games, except for *Worms Golf*. The idea is to hit a grenade to the end of the course and blow up the worm in the hole within a certain number of shots.



WORMS 4: MAYHEM

System: Various
Year Released: 2005

Team17's last 3D *Worms* game was more polished than its predecessors. It brought online play to consoles, allowed worms to be customised and featured a great single-player story mode.



WORMS OPEN WARFARE

System: DS, PSP
Year Released: 2006

Handheld *Worms* games – with exceptions – have always been poor. *Open Warfare*, however, is a great game that worked superbly on PSP. The less said about the DS version the better.



WORMS

System: Xbox Live Arcade
Year Released: 2007

Not to be confused with the Amiga original, this version is a re-working of *Open Warfare* made for 360's online service. There aren't many weapons but that only makes the gameplay more tactical in nature.

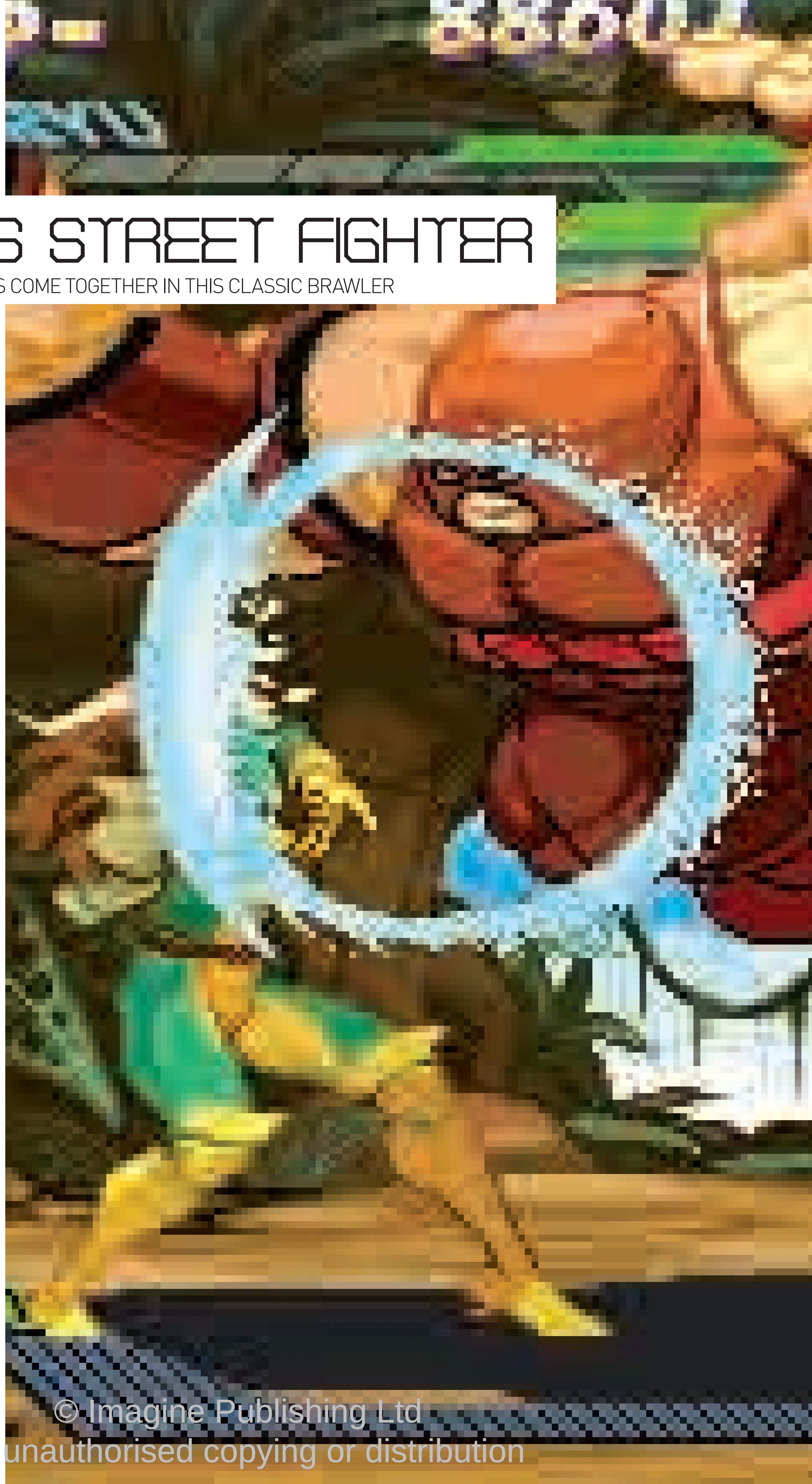


WORMS OPEN WARFARE 2

System: DS, PSP
Year Released: 2007

A giant leap from *Open Warfare*, this sequel features full online play, and loads of extra modes and new weapons, appearing for the first time. This time around the DS version is also very good.





X-MEN VS STREET FIGHTER

TWO LEGENDARY FRANCHISES COME TOGETHER IN THIS CLASSIC BRAWLER



- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SATURN
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25



HISTORY

X-Men Vs. Street Fighter **isn't really loved by most purists of the beat-'em-up genre.** Many feel that the characters lack imagination, they're too unbalanced and that the over-the-top air juggling and frantically fast pace kills the game.

Those people are wrong.

Yes, Capcom's gloriously extravagant brawler is far from perfect and if you wanted to, you could spend an afternoon dissecting its numerous flaws, but it's been put together with such joyful exuberance that you can't help but instantly fall in love with it.

By pitting some of Marvel's heaviest hitters against its own famous creations, Capcom dared to get players to discover the answer to one of the most important questions a beat-'em-connoisseur could ask. Namely, who would actually win in a scrap between Wolverine and Ryu?

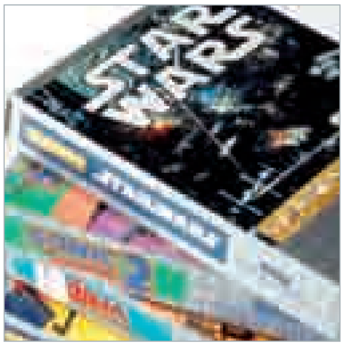
While there are 16 different fighters to chose from – eight X-Men and eight Capcom heroes – the player is free to pair them together however he chooses. Want to team-up the speed and versatility of Ryu, with the brute strength of Juggernaut? No problem, or perhaps you want Magneto and M Bison to take on all and sundry? No matter what your preference you'll easily find a combination to your liking.

Once the teams have been formed, it's then straight in to the action, and what glorious over-the-top mayhem it is. Super jumps launch you soaring into the air; your other fighter can be tagged-in with a press of two buttons and the aforementioned air juggling, while tricky to begin with, soon becomes second nature.

Most impressive though, is how faithful the Saturn conversion was to its CPSII parent. Due to the inclusion of the 4MB RAM Cartridge, Capcom was able to treat Saturn owners to a near identical conversion that made the PlayStation version look rather poor – a fair few frames of animation were missing and there was no tag switching – in comparison.

A shame then that the proposed UK release was cancelled at the very last moment.


TIME
PRESS ST







Year released: 1990 (Japan) 1991 (US and Europe) 1992 (Australia)

Original price: $149.99/£99.99 (£129.99 bundles)

Buy it now for: £20+

Associated magazines: Mean Machines Sega, Sega Pro, Sega Power, Sega Force, Sega Zone, CVG Go! Handheld

Why the Game Gear was great… With full screen colour, a host of arcade Sega classics and an expansive Master System back catalogue to take advantage of, the Game Gear provided hours of entertainment, great design and a dazzling range of first-class software

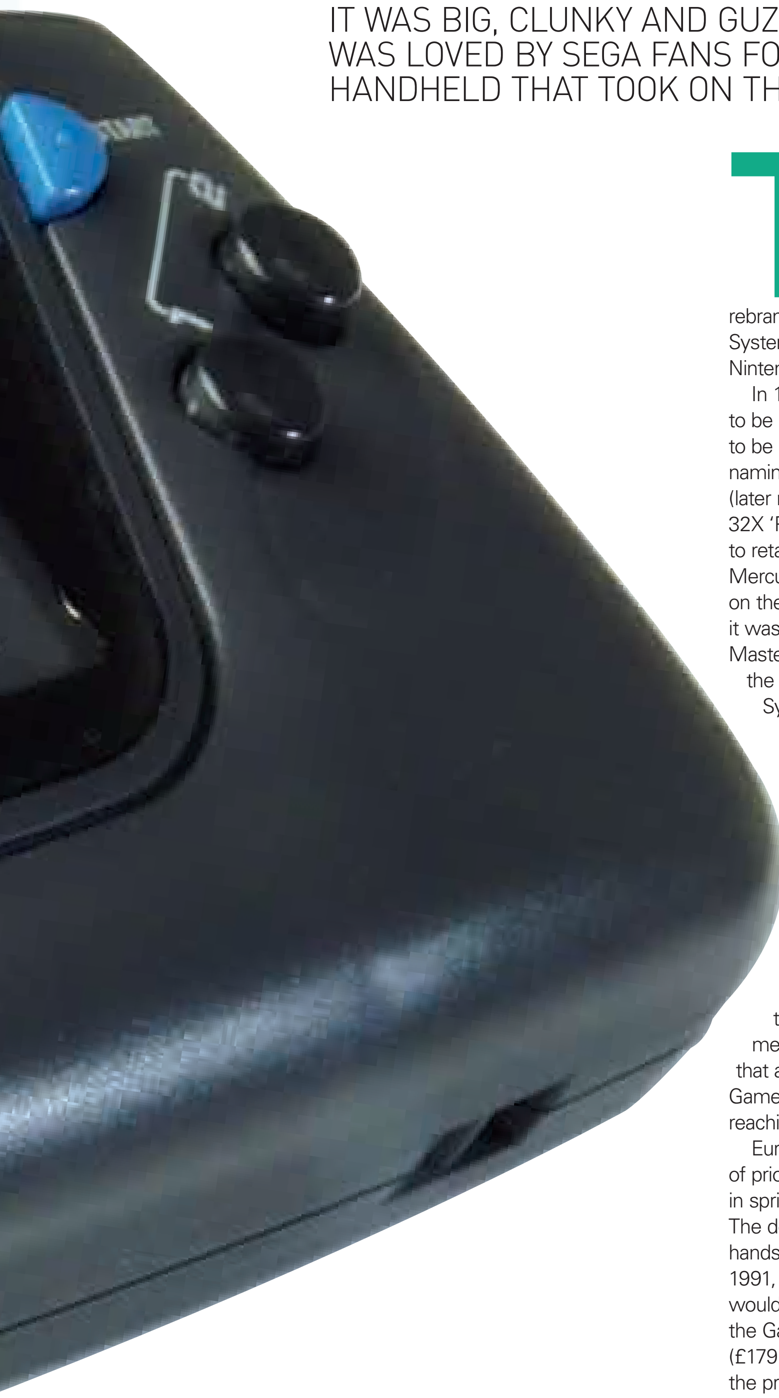




RETROINSPECTION

GAME GEAR

IT WAS BIG, CLUNKY AND GUZZLED BATTERIES BY THE GALLON, YET THE GAME GEAR WAS LOVED BY SEGA FANS FOR ITS VARIETY OF SOFTWARE. KIM WILD LOOKS AT THE HANDHELD THAT TOOK ON THE GAME BOY, YET ULTIMATELY FAILED TO SUCCEED



The Nineties followed what had been an interesting decade for Sega. The company had a profitable arcade division with the likes of *Out Run, Shinobi* and *After Burner* and also released the Mark III console to compete with the Famicom. When the Famicom launched in America in 1986 as the rebranded NES, Sega followed with its own machine, the Master System, (a redesigned Mark III console) which failed to surpass Nintendo's dominance despite a substantial following in Europe.

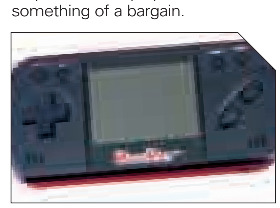
In 1989, Nintendo released its handheld, the Game Boy, and not to be outdone, Sega began work on its own machine, which was to be "everything the Game Boy wasn't." Sega had a penchant for naming all its consoles after planets during the development process (later machines like the Genesis would be called 'Project Venus', the 32X 'Project Mars' and the Saturn 'Project Saturn', the only console to retain its original codename), so development began on 'Project Mercury', later renamed as the 'Game Gear.' In order to cut down on the development time and get the console out into stores quickly, it was decided that the handheld would use technology from the Master System, with the major difference being the colour palette: the Game Gear had 4,096 colours as opposed to the Master System's paltry 64 colours.

The handheld launched in Japan on 6 October 1990 with a successful debut, shifting 40,000 units in its first two days. Within a month, 90,000 consoles had sold and back orders exceeded 600,000. In 1991, Sega would launch the Kid's Gear in Japan, a repackaged version of the handheld aimed at the younger end of the market, focusing on children's titles although it was still compatible with Game Gear software. This handheld, like many special edition models would stay firmly in Japan. Regarding the American launch, Robert Botch, Sega's marketing director for the Game Gear remarked, "there is clearly a need for a quality portable system that provides features other systems have failed to deliver. This means easy-to-view, full-colour graphics and exciting quality games that appeal to all ages." His words seemed to ring true when the Game Gear arrived in America in 1991 priced at $149.99, with sales reaching 500,000 for the launch year and 900,000 by 1992.

Europeans and Australians would once again come last in the list of priorities, as the Game Gear was originally scheduled for release in spring 1991, but wouldn't actually reach these shores until 1992. The delay resulted in keen importers forking out £200 just to get their hands on the latest technology. At the time of its announcement in 1991, distributor Virgin Mastertronic revealed that the Game Gear would retail at around a hundred pounds, more expensive than the Game Boy (£69.99), but more affordable than the Atari Lynx (£179.99). However, in response to the competition, Atari dropped the price of the Lynx to £129.99 before the Game Gear's launch, so when Sega's machine finally arrived priced at £99.99, it only had a slight price advantage over its colour rival.

A New PlayPal

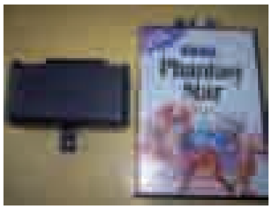
The last few years have seen the re-emergence of the Game Gear, this time in the form of a portable alongside Master System titles. The PlayPal portable (aka Coleco elsewhere) contains 20 built-in Sega titles, can hook up to a television and doesn't drain batteries the same way the Game Gear does. Although the choice of games could be better (*The Ninja*, *Aztec Adventure* anyone?) there's plenty in here for retro fans, such as *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* (and *Hi-Tech World*), *Super Columns*, *Ecco: The Tides Of Time* and *Fantasy Zone*. The inclusion of rarer titles like *Sonic Triple Trouble*, *Sonic Drift 2* and *Snail Maze* (a game preloaded on early Master System consoles only) makes it a viable purchase for those who don't own the original. Sold at the cheap price of £12 ($24 at time of writing) at PlayAsia (www.play-asia.com) it's something of a bargain.



GAME GEAR

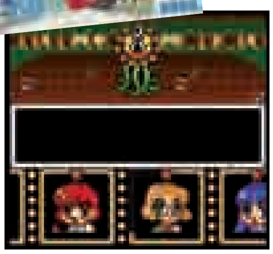


» The Game Gear Tuner is still highly collectable but won't work on later models or the Majesco-released machines.



» The Master System convertor allowed many extra titles to be played on the Game Gear.





» One of the many limited-edition models that hit Japan with a bundled game.

Early launch titles included *Columns*, *Super Monaco GP*, *G-Loc* and *Castle Of Illusion* (a direct port of the Master System title). *Wonder Boy*, *Woody Pop* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* followed shortly afterwards. The initial Game Gear launch at £99.99 was for the machine only, with later bundles including *Columns* or *Super Monaco GP* for the same price. *Columns*, a game created by Jay Geertsen for DOS and ported to the Atari ST before he sold the rights to Sega, focused around matching three jewels according to colour to make them disappear. Principally aimed at competing with *Tetris*, *Columns* never really had a chance of winning people away from Nintendo's flagship title, but it was popular enough to keep Sega's hopes alive. Sega's popular *Sonic The Hedgehog* mascot also boosted sales due to his 'cool' image. The bundled package of *Sonic* with the machine and a power adapter (previously bought separately) at £129.99 proved hard for gamers to resist.

After the initial excitement and success at launch, faults with the Game Gear soon became apparent. While it had a sleek, sophisticated appearance, it was a monster in size compared to the Game Boy, which wasn't that small itself. In Japan, the Game Gear had numerous quality issues, with early models breaking easily, doing little to endear it to an increasingly apathetic public, although such problems did seem to be less of an issue elsewhere. The biggest drawback, and the main factor which ultimately resulted in Nintendo winning the handheld war, was the lack of substantial battery life. The Game Boy may have had a monochrome screen, but this enabled it to have around 20-30 hours battery life in comparison to the Game Gear's rather feeble six hours. While Sega would release rechargeable battery packs cutting the cost down for consumers, it would only extend power to 8-10 hours and their bulkiness added to the cumbersome weight of the Game Gear.

However, the Game Gear also had a lot in its favour compared to the Game Boy. It's coloured, backlit display was impressive for the time (despite blurring issues), meaning it was easy to play in poor lighting conditions, and its stereo sound was an improvement on Nintendo's offering. The D-pad was bigger and more responsive and the lengthways structure meant it was more ergonomically designed for hours of play rather than the Game Boy, which was prone to cause cramp after extended periods of time.

> "LACK OF BATTERY LIFE ULTIMATELY LED TO NINTENDO WINNING THE HANDHELD WAR. THE GAME BOY HAD 20-30 HOURS COMPARED TO THE GAME GEAR'S PALTRY SIX"

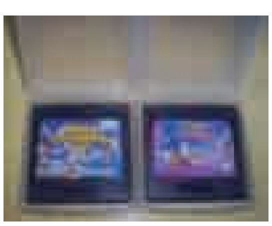
In order to draw in more customers, different colour Game Gear models were released, most notably in Japan. America received a blue sports edition in 1993 bundled with *World Series Baseball*, and another supplied with *The Lion King*. This would be the only colour model besides the standard black one that Americans would receive. A Coca-Cola limited edition machine packaged with the game *Coca-Cola Kid* appeared in Japan in 1994, which was a red/orange hue and had the Coca-Cola logo imprinted on the front. Later models would include a *Magic Knight Rayearth* bundle (red with the game's logo visible on the handheld), a limited-edition white Game Gear that could be bought in a case with a matching TV tuner, a light blue Game Gear (which also reached Canada and Australia), a smoke edition (not too dissimilar to the standard black) and the yellow Game Gear, which was the last to be released in 1996. Despite the variety of different packages in Japan, the gaming public remained indifferent to the machine, with only 1.78 million sales from the country out of the total global figure of 8.65 million by 2004. None of the coloured machines would ever reach Europe.



» A unique protection accessory, making the Game Gear even bigger.



» PAL boxes are noticeably bigger than the Japanese editions.



» Games like *Tails' Adventure* and *Triple Trouble* are increasingly rare, especially the PAL versions.



» Exclusively released in Japan only, *Gunstar Heroes* now goes a pretty penny.



» One of the UK's adverts focused on the games, rather than attacking the Game Boy.



» Wise words here, from *Shining Force*.



» This rather nifty limited edition Game Gear came with a matching TV Tuner, but was only released in Japan.



» The wonderful *GG Shinobi* scored a fully deserved 90% when it was reviewed in Mean Machines.

One of the other problems with the Game Gear was a lack of software. Nintendo had 90% control over the market that ensured only a few third party companies could create games for the Game Gear, leaving the rest down to Sega. As a result, many games were essentially ports of pre-existing Master System titles, something that didn't go unnoticed amongst the hardcore fraternity. It wasn't all bad though, as the Game Gear would host some excellent Sega games that couldn't be played elsewhere. *GG Shinobi* was an excellent addition to the popular franchise which would go on to receive a superb sequel (*Shinobi 2*), while Sonic was milked for all his worth, including releases of *Sonic Blast*, *Sonic Triple Trouble*, *Sonic Labyrinth*, *Tails' Adventure*, *Tails' Sky Patrol* and *Sonic Drift 1* and *2* (known as *Sonic Drift Racing* in Europe). All of which could only be played on a Game Gear, until Tec Toy bought the licence to port some of the games to the Master System several years later. Classic RPG series such as *Phantasy Star* and *Shining Force* got the handheld treatment, although only the third game *Shining Force: Sword Of Hajya* would ever receive an English translation. *Megaman*, *Gunstar Heroes*, *Panzer Dragoon Mini* and *GG Aleste* were Japanese only exclusives that to this day, command high sums of money due to their rarity. The diversity of the catalogue, despite its Master System roots, was enough to muscle in on the Lynx's territory, managing to gain sales away from Atari's handheld, but failing to make a dent in Nintendo's dominance.

While the Game Gear received the usual accessories you would come to expect, such as, a link up cable, carrying cases, car lighter adapters and rechargeable battery packs, it also had some unique accessories that made it stand out from the Game Boy and gave it some added popularity. A TV Tuner that slotted into the back of the cartridge slot was released making it into an all-round entertainment unit. At the time, a TV Tuner on a handheld console was an innovation and was completely ahead of its time. Although, priced at £74.99 it was expensive considering that portable televisions didn't cost a lot more. However, the device appealed to collectors and gave the Game Gear a unique status on the market. A dispute with the manufacturer ensured that the TV Tuner wouldn't receive prolonged support however, as later models would prove incompatible with the gadget, even with Sega's own production line. Despite being a novelty, the TV Tuner is highly sought after and even today you would expect to pay £40-50 for one in good condition. A Master System converter was also released, allowing gamers to play Master System titles on the move, which instantly expanded the back catalogue of available software. All games worked with the converter, but as everything had to be shrunk down to the smaller screen, it meant that any titles with lots of text such as RPGs were barely readable and any games that were primarily sprite based, such as *Space Harrier*, were incredibly difficult to see. While Sega were working on a device that allowed Game Gear titles to be played on the Master System, it never materialised due to the problems of the Game Gear's larger colour palette.

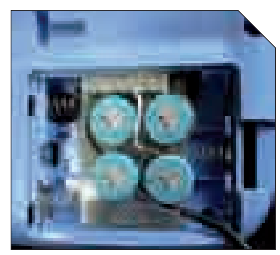
Eventually, in 1997, support for the handheld dwindled despite lasting admirably for six years against tough opposition. Sega, for most of the machine's lifespan, was far more focused on the big consoles such as the 32X, Mega CD and the Saturn; to really give the Game Gear the proper marketing support it needed and finally withdrew the product. The machine would resurface briefly in 2000 when Majesco bought the rights for the Genesis and Game Gear from Sega. Majesco's model differs slightly from the original, although it features the same Sega board, some of the accessories including the TV Tuner don't work while certain Master System converters are incompatible or fail to run the games properly. In some ways the handheld is better than Sega's model as it's a bit lighter and has a nicer screen, but the build of the machine feels cheaper than its predecessor.

The demise of the Game Gear was a sad occasion for its devoted following, even though it went largely unnoticed by the rest of the gaming world. Yet for all the handhelds that have gone up against the might of Nintendo and ultimately lost out, Sega's Game Gear managed to last the longest, only outdone in sales by the Sony PSP. For its fans, it will remain a piece of classic gaming hardware whose legacy lives on forever.

Hacking the Gear

In an issue of *EGM* magazine, Sega was shown hooking the Game Gear machine up to a television, enabling games to be played on the big screen. Such a method was never made commercial, but various modders in the scene have managed to hack into the machine in order to do this. The modification works by soldering specific circuit boards through the back of the battery compartment. Until recently, such a modification resulted in all games playing in black and white, but in 2004, Xavier and Sankichi managed to find ways of soldering the machine so that the games will display in colour.

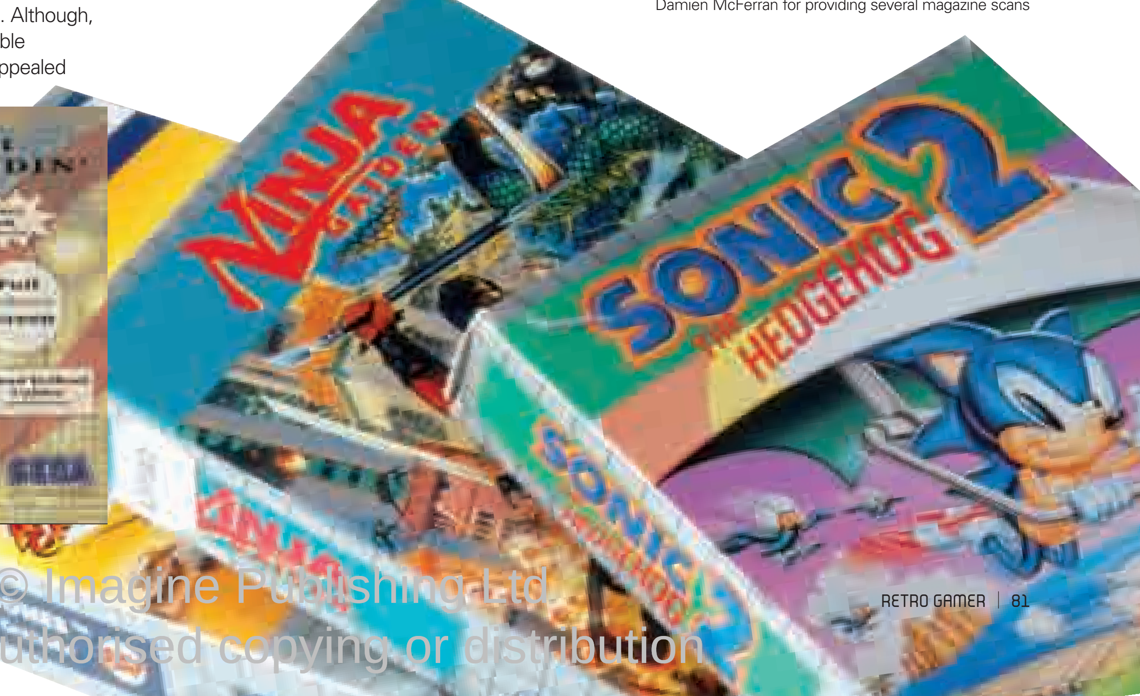
Other gamers have also found ways of getting Game Gear games to work on the Master System, requiring the use of a Master System flash cart, Game Gear roms and some Z-80 programming knowledge. Check out www.disgruntleddesigner.com/chrisc/segahacking/ for more details.



THANKS TO www.segaxtreme.net for certain photographs and Damien McFerran for providing several magazine scans



» They weren't pretendin' – an early Game Gear advert.

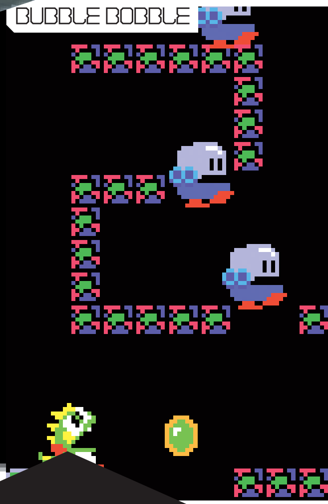


PERFECT TEN GAMES




GUNSTAR HEROES


WONDER BOY: THE DRAGON'S TRAP


BUBBLE BOBBLE

GUNSTAR HEROES

» **RELEASED:** 1995

» **DEVELOPED BY:** TREASURE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** IKARUGA

Now this is very impressive. It's obviously cut down when compared to the Mega Drive original, but this adaptation of Treasure's superb run-and-gunner is still utterly brilliant and is a must own for anyone with a love of Sega's bulky handheld. Incredibly fast paced and with some gob-smackingly good visuals, *Gunstar Heroes* shrinks down admirably well to the Game Gear's tiny screen and offers an amazing amount of pyrotechnical wizardry. Gameplay is as intricate and as varied as ever, and it's further proof that Treasure is one of the most talented developers around. *Gunstar* is extremely hard to get hold of now, so expect to pay a pretty penny for it.

BAKU BAKU ANIMAL

» **RELEASED:** 1996

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** OUT RUN

While *Columns* is the Game Gear puzzler that most gamers have probably heard of, it's the excellent *Baku Baku Animal* that deserves all the recognition. Originally released in 1995, *Baku Baku Animal* plays like a cross between *Tetris* and *Puyo Puyo* and sees you stacking up a variety of different food stuffs until the required animal comes along and clears the lot, thus setting up potential chain reactions and the possibility of huge scores. Instantly accessible and yet impossible to put down, *Baku Baku Animal* is one of the best puzzlers around and is perfectly suited to the Game Gear's "on the go" nature.

WONDER BOY: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

» **RELEASED:** 1992

» **DEVELOPED BY:** WESTONE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WONDER BOY

***Wonder Boy*, like many other Game Gear titles, is basically a port of the Master System original. This should not put you off however, as *The Dragon's Trap* was one of the best games to appear on the 8-bit machine.** *The Dragon's Trap* is a huge, sprawling adventure that sees the poor lad having to change into a variety of different animals after being cursed by the game's imposing dragons. It's going to cost you a fortune in batteries, but if you're looking for a solid arcade adventure, you really won't find anything finer. Quite simply one of the Game Gear's finest moments. Even if it is just a port.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

» **RELEASED:** 1992

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

While some gamers were less than happy with *Sonic 2*'s lack of difficulty there can be no denying that it's a highly polished title that deserves its place in this month's top ten. Featuring bold, bright visuals, a great sensation of speed and some faithfully reproduced tunes, *Sonic 2* is a wonderful adaptation of the original Master System and Mega Drive titles that plays to the strengths of its host machine and ends up working exceptionally well on the Game Gear's miniature screen. There's a fair amount of blurring that will no doubt spoil the experience for some, but old technology can't disguise the sheer amount of shine that lies beneath.

BUBBLE BOBBLE

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **DEVELOPED BY:** TAITO

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RAINBOW ISLANDS

Taito's *Bubble Bobble* must be one of the most ported games in history, but when you consider how good it is, it's unsurprising that so many platforms have featured a version of it. Based on the Master System port (which was in itself a rather brilliant conversion) this Game Gear effort perfectly captures the charm of the arcade original and is another essential release for Sega's portable console. There's a cracking two-player mode, although you'll need the required link-up cable and a second copy of the game. The graphics are as cute as previous versions, and the timeless gameplay is as strong as ever. One of the best platformers ever made.



BAKU BAKU ANIMAL

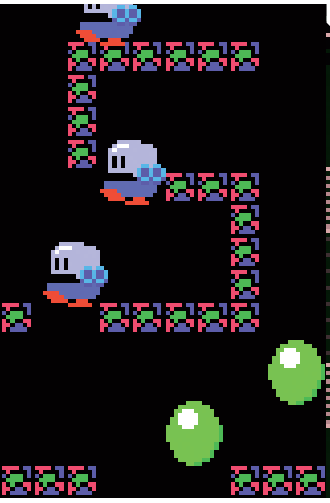


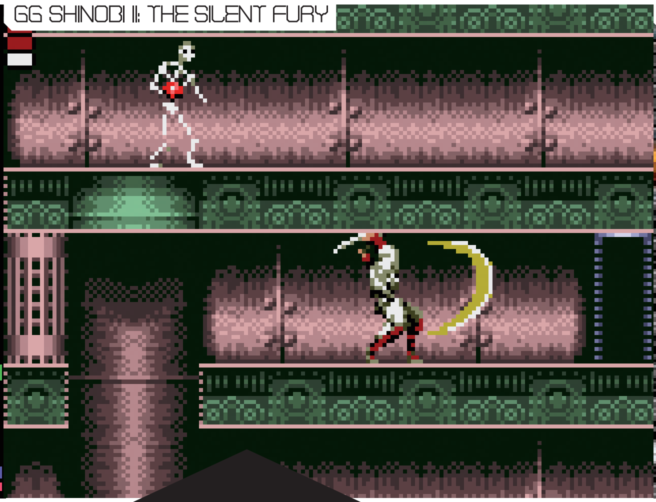
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2


STREETS OF RAGE 2

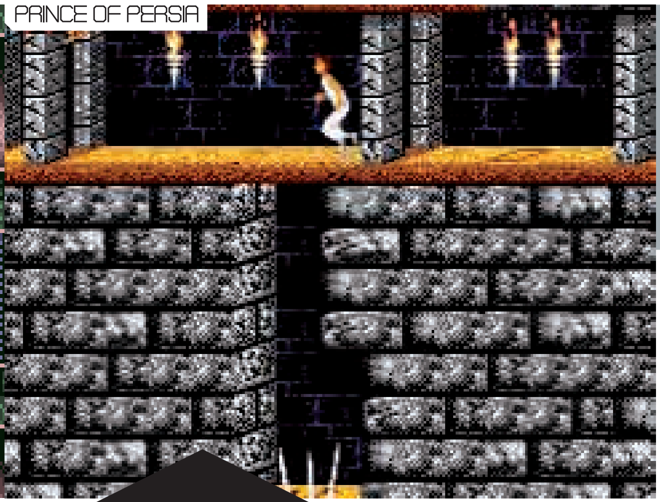
GAME GEAR

It put up a brave fight for six years, but even Sega and Sonic couldn't stop the success of Nintendo's monochrome Game Boy. Console yourself with ten of the machine's best games.





GG SHINOBI II: THE SILENT FURY



PRINCE OF PERSIA

STREETS OF RAGE 2

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GG SHINOBI

There are very few beat-'em-ups available on the Game Gear, but even if there were a hundred to choose from, it's doubtful that they'd match the quality of Sega's *Streets Of Rage*. From its meticulously created sprites, to the exhilarating combat, *Streets Of Rage 2* is a fantastic re-creation of the Mega Drive original and proves that the Game Gear is more than capable of hosting a strong fighter. The music sadly lacks the polish of the original Mega Drive hit, but when you consider the technical limitations of the machine, this is hardly surprising. Just console yourself with a great fighter that plays as good as it looks.

GG SHINOBI II: THE SILENT FURY

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

While the original is unquestionably a classic slice of ninja heaven, the superior sequel improves on it in every possible way. You're still controlling a different selection of ninjas – after you've rescued them of course – but now the far tighter level design, faster flowing action and greatly improved gameplay mechanics make this Game Gear exclusive title even more desirable. It's also far more balanced than its predecessor – which was notoriously difficult in places – meaning it's the perfect place to start if you're looking for a solid action title or are brand new to the series (where have you been for the past 20 years?)

POWER STRIKE 2

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **DEVELOPED BY:** COMPILE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER ALESTE

While the original *Power Strike* (or *GG Aleste* as it's known in Japan) was never released in the UK, the far superior sequel did make it here, and, as was typical of developer Compile, it was another excellent shooter. While it features similar gameplay to the Master System outing, visually it's been massively enhanced and boasts some great looking sprites and awesome bosses, that are as ugly, as they are tough. With its mech theme, over-the-top explosions and hectic gameplay, *Power Strike 2* remains one of the best blasters on Sega's machine and instantly makes us forget about the gaming atrocities that were *G: LOC* and *Halley Wars*.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **DEVELOPED BY:** BRODERBUND
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MYST

Like Taito's *Bubble Bobble*, *Prince Of Persia* seems to be another title that's been ported to practically every console and computer known to man. Based on the Master System outing, this is nevertheless a stunning conversion that features amazingly convincing animation, slightly more responsive controls and some simple, yet very effective visuals. Experts will obviously be expected to whizz through the game in under an hour, but *POP* has been put together with so much care and attention that you'll be more than happy to just languidly stroll around and drink in the superb level design while admiring the Prince's natty choice of clothing.

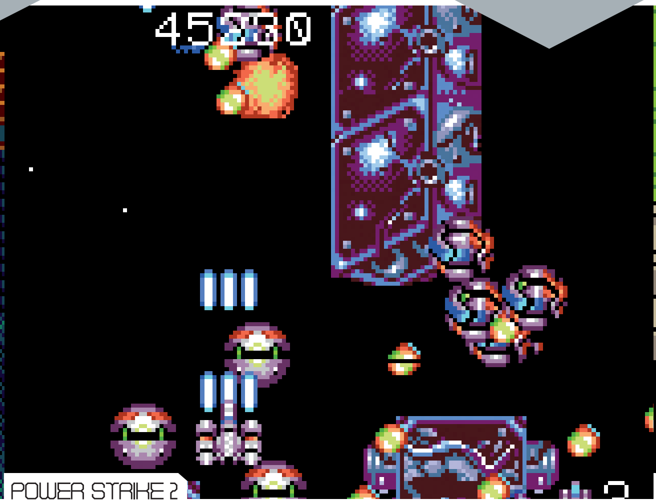
SHINING FORCE II: THE SWORD OF HAJYA

» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **DEVELOPED BY:** SONIC SOFTWARE PLANNING
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE: FINAL CONFLICT

On the one hand you could feel rather cheated by *Sword of Hajya*. Mainly because it's little more than a direct port of the second story that appeared on the Mega CD's *Shining Force* CD. On the other hand it's the best RPG on the system to have received a Western translation, so if you're a fan of the genre you really have precious little choice.

It may look simple, and the bland backdrops and generic looking characters are certainly nothing to write home about, but with *Shining Force II* it's all about the story and the turn-based combat, both of which remain as good as on any other *Shining Force* adventure.

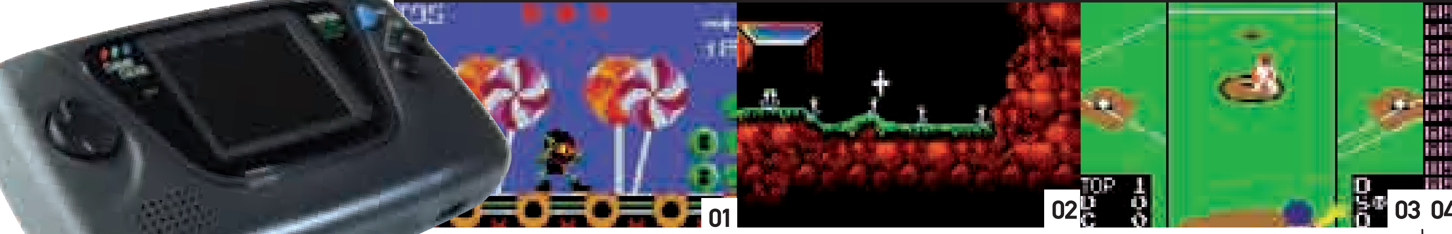




POWER STRIKE 2

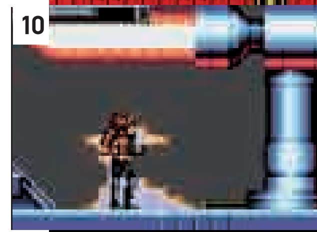


SHINING FORCE II



GAME GEAR
and the rest...

While Sega's Game Gear offered plenty of Master System ports and kids' licences there were still plenty of great titles to discover. Over the following two pages are some of the very best and worst games that are available for the popular handheld.



01 ZOOL
02 LEMMINGS
03 BATTER UP
04 FACTORY PANIC
05 MICKEY'S ULTIMATE CHALLENGE
06 DEFENDERS OF OASIS
07 BAKU BAKU ANIMAL
08 MS. PAC-MAN
09 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
10 WOLFCHILD
11 GG SHINOBI
12 ALADDIN
13 CHAKAN
14 ARCH RIVALS
15 MARBLE MADNESS
16 GUNSTAR HEROES
17 POWER STRIKE II
18 TAILS' ADVENTURE
19 MORTAL KOMBAT 3
20 FIFA SOCCER 96
21 THE SMURFS
22 WONDER BOY
23 ROAD RASH
24 MEGA MAN
25 BUST-A-MOVE
26 JUNCTION
27 CRYSTAL WARRIORS
28 HALLEY WARS
29 OUTRUN
30 SONIC CHAOS
31 SUPER SPACE INVADERS
32 KLAX
33 DOUBLE DRAGON
34 THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN
35 JAMES POND II: CODENAME ROBOCOD
36 SIDE POCKET
37 DYNAMITE HEADDY
38 NBA JAM
39 RISE OF THE ROBOTS
40 ULTIMATE SOCCER
41 SPACE HARRIER
42 STAR WARS
43 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
44 JUDGE DREDD
45 PANZER DRAGOON MINI
46 THE TERMINATOR
47 ARENA: MAZE OF DEATH
48 COLUMNS
49 NINJA GAIDEN
50 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
51 ALIEN 3
52 SUPER OFF-ROAD
53 PAPERBOY
54 AXBATTLER: A LEGEND OF GOLDEN AXE
55 DRAGON CRYSTAL
56 G-LOC: AIR BATTLE
57 ALIEN SYNDROME
58 PENGO
59 CHOPLIFTER III
60 STRDER RETURNS: JOURNEY FROM DARKNESS
61 THE JUNGLE BOOK
62 WOODY POP
63 CHUCK ROCK
64 VR TROOPERS
65 GG SHINOBI II: THE SILENT FURY
66 ANDRE AGASSI TENNIS
67 STREETS OF RAGE II
68 WIZARD PINBALL
69 BATTLETOADS
70 PGA TOUR GOLF
71 SONIC BLAST
72 WONDER BOY: THE DRAGON'S TRAP
73 ZOOP
74 ARCADE CLASSICS
75 BUBBLE BOBBLE
76 LEGEND OF ILLUSION
77 PAC-ATTACK
78 VIRTUA FIGHTER MINI
79 FANTASY ZONE GEAR
80 EARTHWORM JIM
81 KRUSTY'S FUNHOUSE
82 MORTAL KOMBAT
83 GALAGA '91
84 SHAQ FU
85 WWF RAW
86 BUSTER BALL
87 ECCO THE DOLPHIN




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THE MAKING OF...

BLAST CORPS

Smashing cities to smithereens to save them from being smashed to smithereens, there isn't anything quite as absurdly ironic than a game of Blast Corps. Rob Crossley sits down with lead designer Martin Wakeley to try and make sense of the senseless





IN THE KNOW



» PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
» DEVELOPER: RARE
» RELEASED: 1997
» GENRE: PUZZLE/ACTION
» EXPECT TO PAY: £10+

Throughout the latter half of the Nineties, all eyes were squarely focused on Rare. N64 owners looked upon the Twycross-based development outfit as their saviours; an extraordinary company that had single-handedly doubled the number of must-have titles for their game-starved console. Nintendo itself saw Rare as one of its closest allies; a team it could trust to cradle some of its most valuable IP. And, not before long, Microsoft would envision it as a record-breaking acquisition: $377 million in total. Whichever perspective you happened to look from, the same image remained. Rare was special.

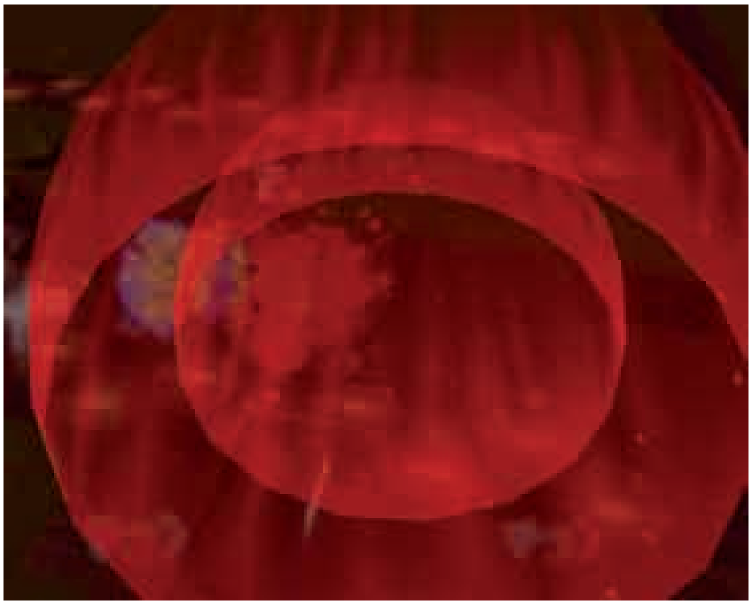
Such a reputation isn't made overnight, though perhaps Rare knows all too well that it can sink as fast. A consecutive string of seven N64 games, ranging from the brilliant to the breathtaking, materialised from Rare's headquarters. Classics such as *GoldenEye 007, Banjo-Kazooie, Jet Force Gemini* and *Perfect Dark* turned Rare's gold-trimmed logo into a stamp of guaranteed quality. That incomparable roll of gaming gems kicked off, very quietly, on 1 September 1997 with the release of a little thing called *Blast Corps*.

"*Blast Corps* was my first big project, though I suppose it wouldn't be considered as a 'big project' these days", says Martin Wakeley, who was just a young graduate when he was appointed the role of lead designer for Rare's first N64 game. A decade since his first major project, Martin is currently busy polishing off the upcoming *FPS Haze* at Free Radical, and notices the tremendous difference the videogame design process has undertaken in those ten intervening years.

"During the development of *Blast Corps* there were never more than seven people working on the game at the same time. Most of the time it was just this core group of four of us, who were mainly graduates. That sort of thing just doesn't happen any more." Understandably, there is always the risk of losing the core personality of a videogame when its components are spread across a large team. *Blast Corps* on the other hand, crafted together by a small troupe of developers, felt like it never lost anything between its concept and release. Rare's faith in such a raw, inexperienced team certainly paid dividends. *Blast Corps* achieved unanimous critical success when it was released. Its concept was original, refreshing and distinct. A Frankenstein of puzzle, racer, strategy and action game, it was common that players would bulldoze a clear pathway through obstacles at one point, and hijack a boat for use as an impromptu bridge the next.

"The concept for the game was something that Chris Stamper (co-founder of Rare) had been trying to get going for years", explains Martin. "His famous quote was 'If you knock down buildings, it will be fun.' Obviously, the challenge for us always, was finding a reason to knock down buildings. So we came up with what we referred to as a 'Constantly Moving Object.' It helped to channel the gameplay and was used to set a time limit."

That 'Constantly Moving Object' became an unstoppable nuclear missile carrier, which – the story goes – had



» The missile carrier's gorgeous red explosion occasionally remedies the frustration in failing to prevent it. Occasionally.



» The Thunderfist doing what it does best: Dragon Punching its way through buildings.

to crawl though the game's wealth of locations without touching, bumping or even grazing a single building, fence or hedge along the way. Essentially it was a physical clock, a virtual progress bar, and an atomic *Lemming* rolled into one.

Armed with a selection of odd bulldozers, the player had to obliterate everything to forge a clear path. Not every obstacle was susceptible to straightforward smashing; players often needed to keep calm when faced with a seemingly invincible obstacle, and would need to think fast in working out how to destroy it. It was this fusion of puzzle elements and frantic gotta-smash-it-all action that made *Blast Corps* such a distinct package, and a game very difficult to pigeonhole into a genre.

In a stroke of genius, players could return to the cleared levels, this time without the time restraints of the missile carrier. Suddenly that frantic action-cum-puzzler became an exploration game, one where Rare had meticulously tucked away the most hard to reach secrets, and one that could satisfy even the most obsessive of completist tendencies. But there was still more to the game. At times, a cleared pathway caused bonus levels to appear on the Stage Select screen. These ranged from a 'smash everything' time-attack to a *Super Sprint*-esque circuit racing game. Now, with the benefit of ten years of hindsight, how would Martin best classify such an unclassifiable game?

"It's hard to say, though I've always felt that *Blast Corps* was a puzzle game. I can completely understand why people would consider it an action game, or a racer, and so on. One of my personal inspirations was a game from Nintendo called *Donkey Kong '94*. The premise was that you had all the elements needed to solve each puzzle from the beginning of every level. The challenge was working out what order to implement them in. Fundamentally, that is what *Blast Corps* is."

Whereas *Donkey Kong 94*'s puzzle-solving elements consisted of humble hammers and switch boxes, *Blast Corps*' puzzle-solving 'tools' came in gloriously destructive and downright odd shapes and sizes. Oddities, such as a motorbike strapped with rocket launchers, a pint-sized gymnastic robot and a rocket-powered dune buggy were all typical of *Blast Corps*' collection of vehicles to use. The fan's favourite was undoubtedly the J-Bomb, a house-sized mech with a rocket pack strapped to its back. Players could freely hover through the sky, à la *Pilotwings*, and dive feet-first into buildings and skyscrapers. It was essentially *Mario*'s ground-pound manoeuvre on a seismic scale, and felt just as satisfying as it sounds.

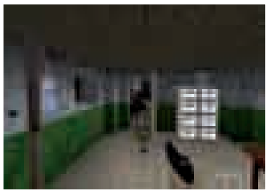
"Our lead artist at the time, Ricky Berwick who is now with Codemasters, was just fantastic. He came up with some really cool ideas for the vehicles and we basically retrofitted them into the play dynamic afterwards." As ill-advised

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ATIC ATAC
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1983

CALIFORNIA GAMES
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1988

GOLDENEYE 007
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1997





» Block 'n' hole brainteasers are one thing, solving them with a bulldozer is quite another.



» True to racing traditions, best laps on racetracks are recorded as ghosts to play against.

BLAST CORPS

KAMEOS

From secret pieces of cheese in *Perfect Dark* to a host of movie parodies in *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, Rare has always enjoyed injecting games with its unique brand of humour. Never one to shy away from a spot of name-dropping either, Rare added some infamous secret vehicles in *Blast Corps*, from *Starsky And Hutch*'s Grand Torino to *The A-Team* van, of course. "They were just a reflection of the Saturday night TV we watched when we were growing up. Our American producers never understood our fascination with their TV shows", recalls Martin. "I guess if we had been a few years older the references could have been *Baywatch* and *Blind Date*… that might have been a bit more difficult to fit into a game…"



as it sounds to reverse-engineer a play mechanic into a group of characters, it couldn't have worked better for Martin and his team. It meant that the game would feature some truly unique vehicles that would be impossible to envision if built from practicalities.

"My favourite vehicle would have to be The Backlash. Its mechanic was borrowed from *Mario Kart 64*'s power slide, it was criticised heavily and I remember defending it for many hours. I think what frustrated people was how it was really hard to pull off a successful slide-smash. Personally I found the challenge immensely satisfying."

And it's not surprising that Martin gets his satisfaction from a good challenge. Tucked away behind *Blast Corps*' main game, a selection of cruel, demanding and downright impossible challenges awaited the player. When ploughing through the game, players would soon begin to realise that they were given medals for completing levels within certain time limits. Ranging from bronze, silver, gold and the fabled platinum, as a player's collection of medals unintentionally grew – sometimes by pure chance – it was only a matter of time before they all fell for the compelling allure of earning them all; hook, line and sinker. Unfortunately, earning a platinum medal is about as rare as sinking a hole-in-one. So, why did Martin and his team impose such merciless challenges?

"BLAST CORPS' RUTHLESS DIFFICULTY CURVE DIDN'T HAMPER ITS CRITICAL ACCLAIM"



» *Blast Corps*' version of *Mario*'s ground-pound was truly seismic.

"There wasn't a chance that players could get all the medals, it was just insane. The platinum thing came about from our QA department. I set the times for the golds, but they wanted a representation to show how well it could be done. It escalated a bit and the Japanese and US QA departments got involved, so it became this intercontinental play off, each QA department outdoing the other. Some of the times were crazy. In truth, I could only get four platinums. Just as a word of warning, if you do get all the platinums it just says 'you can stop now!' which I thought was funny, not sure if anyone got to see it though."

Blast Corps' ruthless difficulty curve didn't hamper its critical acclaim, it was adored by critics and gamers alike. Sadly, its commercial reception didn't quite reflect its critical success. "I was a bit pissed off when *Blast Corps* was released. Sales weren't as high as we imagined. Selling games on the N64 was like shooting fish in a barrel. When you released a title there was so little competition it was almost guaranteed to do well. But I think a legend has grown up that *Blast Corps* sold nothing at all, which simply isn't true. In retrospect, things weren't too shabby at all. We hit number one in the all-format charts and did reasonably well in Japan. We sold close to a million copies of a game that took just over a year to make with a tiny team. You really can't complain when you look at it like that."

» *Blast Corps* will test your skills in different ways. Here, the Ballista needs to shoot open a pathway to reach the Ramdozer.



» The Skyfall's turbo boost can give it an exhilarating launch into the air, crashing it into buildings in a show-stopping fashion.





» Bonus levels occasionally throw up abstract levels to play on. Here, the J-Bomb has to smash into giant, flying, metallic spheres.

And in retrospect, Martin has absolutely no regrets about the time he worked on *Blast Corps*. If anything, he took it for granted, he tells us. He remembers it as one of the most exciting and invigorating times to be a developer. "I remember going to Space World '95 when Nintendo unveiled *Mario 64*", he recalls. "That game made a big difference for me personally. In all honesty, I couldn't ever grasp how the N64 controller's analogue stick would work until I saw *Mario 64*. That was a turning point, it was the first 'true' 3D game I'd ever seen. I assumed that all developers were making N64 games this way! Just watching it in motion and meeting Mr Miyamoto really excited and inspired me to do something great, it was a fantastic time to be a developer."

Blast Corps was undeniably a product of Martin's exhilarating enthusiasm. It was a game filled from head-to-toe with a great wealth of eccentric ideas and quirky humour. From its jovial music and light-hearted take on saving the world to nuclear mass destruction (bearing in mind how easy it would have been to adopt a grave and sombre approach to such a topic), it was obvious that Martin and his team enjoyed making the game. It comes as no surprise, then, that Martin has always toyed with the idea of making a sequel.

"I had ideas for a sequel; the game would have been based on a persistent city environment that would deviate into more of an action-based combat game. I don't think there's any way you can push the gameplay much further though; *Blast Corps* really was a one-trick pony."

Perhaps 'one-trick pony' is the easiest way to remember *Blast Corps*. Labelling it as such however, doesn't do it justice, as it fails to take into account the sheer dedication, talent and enthusiasm of its creators. The term doesn't explain how loony it could be at times, and it overlooks how the game was pushed as far as it would go. However, when telling us a story about a decision he and his team had to make during development, Martin unintentionally sums up *Blast Corps* perfectly:

"One of the vehicles, The Thunderfist, was a robot with one arm and a couple of severed wires for the other, he would roll into a ball and punch his way through buildings. But his one arm wasn't an aesthetic choice at all. In adding everything we could into the game, we soon found out that we had completely run dry of memory. Quite literally, we didn't have enough to give him a second arm. But we didn't mind so much, he still looked really cool without it."

"IT WAS MY FIRST BIG PROJECT, I SUPPOSE IT WOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A 'BIG PROJECT' THESE DAYS" MARTIN WAKELEY

READY TO RUMBLE?

In the archives of videogame folklore you will find an indisputable truth: *Lylat Wars* was the first game ever to utilise the N64's Rumble Pak. But Martin Wakeley recalls how close Rare came to capitalising on the gaming world's fascination with the heavy, battery powered peripheral. "The Rumble Pak was something we worked very closely with Nintendo on. It was utilised in *Blast Corps* for a long time, but there were a few technical issues that we couldn't iron out in time for launch. *Lylat Wars* went on to be the first title to use it and I think we missed out on an opportunity there…" Not only is it a shame that players never got a chance to feel the seismic explosions in *Blast Corps* but, adding salt to the wound, it certainly would have boosted sales.





» The Cyclone Suit acrobatically somersaults its way through buildings. It's odd, awkward and unmistakeably *Blast Corps*.



» At times *Blast Corps* isn't so subtle at paying homage to other games. Here, *Pac Man* is plagiarised to its fullest extent.



RETRORATED



FINAL FIGHT

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £4.99

There's no denying that this is a very impressive version of Capcom's ageing but still rather brilliant scrolling fighter. Granted it's not exactly arcade perfect, but it is a very faithful conversion that features all three characters, every level and even rumble support.

Controls are surprisingly responsive, and while you effectively need two hands in order to play it, the button placement is well thought out and not at all difficult to use.

Granted, it's not a patch on the GBA game that was released several years back, but hey, this is a mobile title, not an actual handheld release. What were you expecting, the moon on a bloody stick? Just be content with a solid conversion of *Final Fight*, that not only looks the part, but actually plays okay as well.





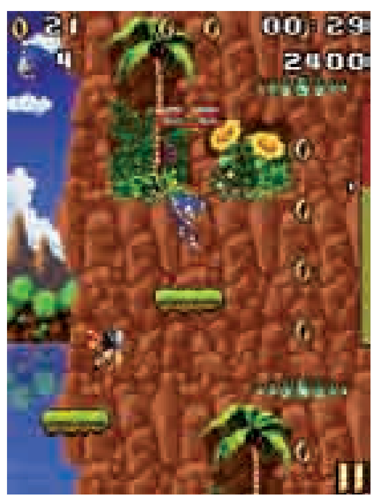
SONIC JUMP

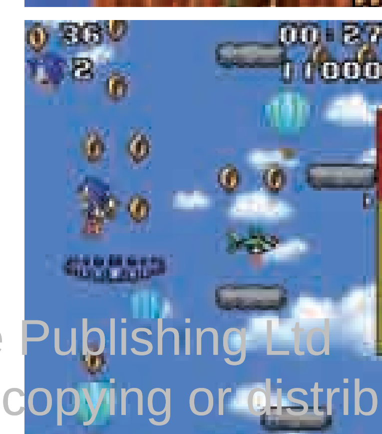
INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** GLU
- **DEVELOPER:** AIRPLAY
- **PRICE:** £4.99

Now this is rather interesting. Instead of Sega's mascot racing through levels like the possessed hedgehog that he so obviously is, this latest effort has him continually jumping skywards in his quest for rings, points and his eventual showdown with Eggman.

What's surprising is that this works far better than the ports of the first Mega Drive game that were released last year, and were horrendously tricky to play. Creator AirPlay has taken a gamble with what people expect from a traditional Sonic game and have come up trumps. The graphics are well detailed and crisp, the gameplay is sublime and incredibly easy to pick up, and there are more than enough levels to keep you entertained. Granted, it's sometimes frustrating when you miss a platform and plummet to your inevitable doom, but if you're looking for a fun platformer then this is an absolutely essential download.







STREET FIGHTER II

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £4.99

Now here's a surprise. Capcom's conversion of arguably its most famous coin-op is actually playable. Yes, it certainly has its fair share of problems, but in reality this is so much better than we dared hope to imagine.

Capcom's decision to assign each special move to its own button may seem like a cop-out to the hardcore, but at least it means you can now actually pull them off without swearing in frustration every five seconds. Sadly, it also means that Capcom's classic brawler is a lot tougher to play than some of its mobile counterparts, mainly because you have so many different buttons to think about pressing.

It's certainly an authentic conversion – authentic is easily our favourite word in this round-up, at the moment – and the background and sprites are instantly recognisable. However, *Street Fighter II* is slightly let down by those aforementioned controls and a ridiculously steep difficulty curve that's higher than Mount Snowdon (but not quite as high as Ben Nevis).



MS. PAC-MAN

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI NETWORKS EUROPE
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £2.50 - £5

While we were tempted to go with the original Namco classic, *Ms. Pac-Man* is quite simply a far better game. Having a variety of different mazes makes things far more interesting, plus the pace is a lot faster and her whorish red lipstick makes us feel all funny inside.

Consuming pills, avoiding ghosts and navigating tricky mazes is just as much fun now as it was back in 1981 and Namco's little minx has lost none of her charm over the last 26 years (although Inky and Clyde are convinced that her arse does look a lot fatter than it once did). Anyway, we digress; regardless of whether she has put any weight on or not, *Ms. Pac-Man* remains an absolute timeless classic, and this mobile phone port is utterly charming. In fact, it will convince you that videogames don't need to look a million dollars in order to play like a proverbial dream.



Yes, *Ms. Pac-Man* may be about as glamorous as *EastEnders* favourite Stacey Slater, but at the end of the day, at least she gets the job done… just like Sta… (oi! That's quite enough of that – ed).

CENTIPEDE

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** GLU
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £4.99

Those expecting a flawless conversion of *Centipede* are going to be very disappointed, as this isn't it. Try as we might there was nowhere on our phone to place a trackball and you can't turn the auto-fire off. Then, of course, we realised that you can't fit a trackball on a phone as you'd never get it into your pocket, and suddenly everything began to make sense.

By not worrying about having to press a separate button to fire, *Centipede* allows you to concentrate on avoiding those mushrooms and insects – and it's a concept that works pretty well. You'll occasionally mistime a shot, but it's far easier than its coin-op counterpart so mistakes don't usually end in disaster. There's even a spanking new mode boasting enhanced looking visuals as well.





RESIDENT EVIL: THE MISSIONS

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £4.99

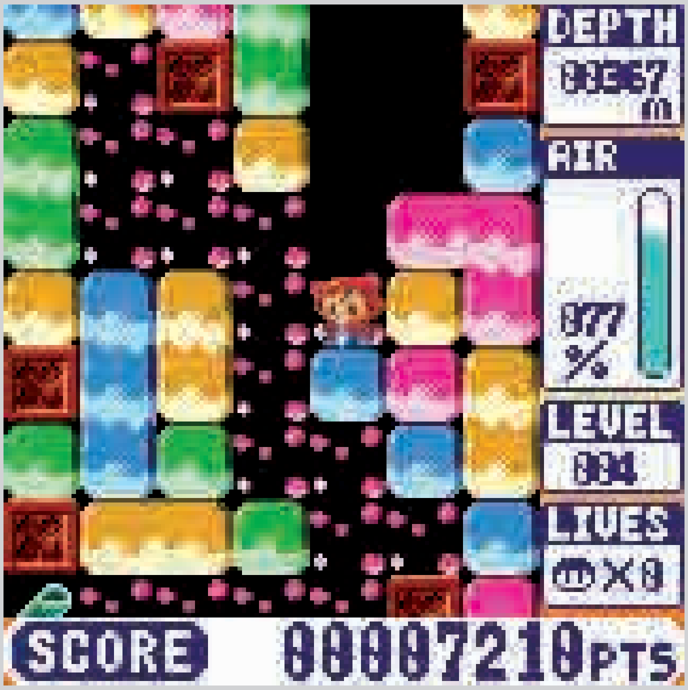
Wow, this has really changed our perception of mobile phone games. Based on the events that take place in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis, The Missions* works beautifully and proves that with a bit of planning, it's possible to make classic titles work beautifully on a mobile format.

Boasting some jaw-dropping 3D visuals, *The Missions* is split into bite-sized chunks that require you to complete over 40 simple tasks. One minute you're taking out a zombie, the next you're tracking an item down, and then you're protecting a survivor, usually by shooting a zombie. It's perfect for gaming on the go and is bolstered by a simple, yet effective, control system and the aforementioned superb graphics. Quite simply the best mobile game we've played for some time.





RETRORATED



MR DRILLER

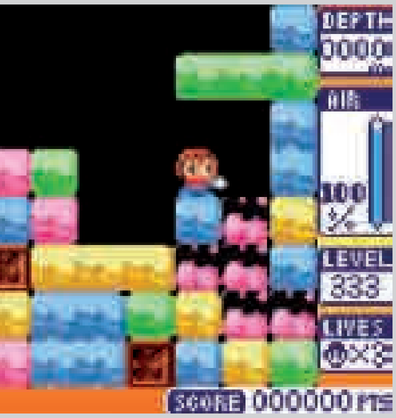
INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI NETWORKS EUROPE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PRICE:** £3 - £5

Namco's back once again with another classic puzzler. While we're stunned (once again) by the game's similarity to its arcade parent, unfortunately it's not quite as accessible as the wonderful *Ms. Pac-Man* (see page 91). *Mr Driller's* biggest problem is that as the levels progress, it simply gets far too fiddly to play.

While Namco has done its very best to make the controls as straightforward as possible, it's all far too easy to make a mistake on the higher levels, and as any *Mr Driller* fan knows, making mistakes just isn't an option.

It's certainly not a bad little game, and fans will certainly enjoy it, but there are far better puzzlers available, many of which are much more responsive to play.





1943

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PRICE:** £4.99

Another Capcom classic, but unlike *Final Fight*, this is far better suited to the mobile format and, as a result, it's a lot more enjoyable to play. In fact, we'd say it's 73.2% more enjoyable to play, although we could be off by one point of a per cent.

Firing, just as with *Centipede*, is done completely automatically, so all you really need to worry about is navigating your way through the authentic-looking levels and shooting down as many enemy planes as possible. Shooting down a squadron of red fighters will result in them dropping a power-up and will also handily replenish your health (although only by a little smidgen). While it's slightly more sluggish when compared to its coin-op peer and has music that will make you want to rip your heart out (or ideally someone else's, you would die after all) it retains a strong challenge and is bound to keep shoot-'em-up fans very happy.



GALAXIAN

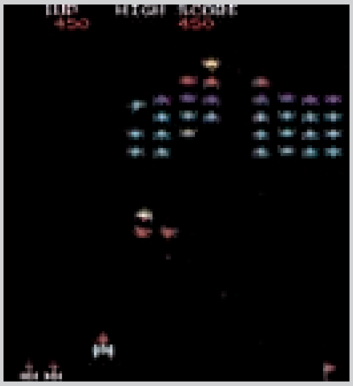
INFORMATION

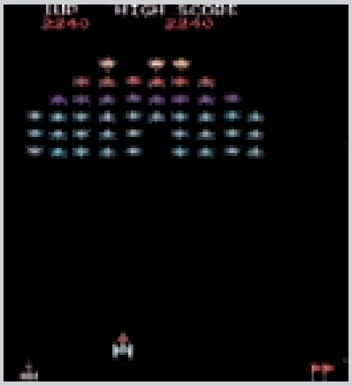
» **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI NETWORKS EUROPE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PRICE:** £3 - £5

We could have reviewed one of the many versions of *Space Invaders* that are currently available to download, but after Campbell's exhaustive guide on page 24, we fancied something a little different and, dare we say it, better.

Galaxian, like many games that were released during the early Eighties, is immediately suited to the mobile phone market. Controls are simple – in this case just left, right and fire – the graphics are faithfully replicated, albeit in a scaled down way and the timeless gameplay is just that. Timeless.

In fact, *Galaxian* is perfect proof of what a mobile phone game should actually be. After all, what's the point in having state-of-the-art 3D technology if the controls you've implemented aren't up to the task? By keeping it simple, Namco has created another mobile phone essential that you really shouldn't be without.





PHOENIX WRIGHT: THE FIRST TURNABOUT

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PRICE:** £4.99

After finding huge success on the Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS, Capcom's famous lawyer, Phoenix Wright is now heading to mobile phones. While this is only the first chapter (the DS version we recently played had four), it is nevertheless a very exciting yarn and the perfect introduction to Capcom's popular franchise for beginners.

Answers can be given with a few quick key presses; the entertaining story is laced with humorous lines and memorable characters and although it's relatively short, it's well worth the asking price – if only because it proves that the point-and-click format is alive and well. Granted, some of the puzzles can seem incredibly obtuse at times, but a little lateral thinking is usually enough to get you on the right track again.



Short and sweet it may be, but it's already got us slavering for the next instalment. Let's just hope Capcom releases it.

DIG DUG DELUXE

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI NETWORKS EUROPE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PRICE:** £3 - £5

"Excellent," began Darran, "another version of *Dig Dug* for me to despise." Regular readers, however, will know that Mr Jones's opinions have changed over the last 23 issues (has it really been that long?) and while he once had nothing but contempt for Namco's coin-op classic, he's now able to tolerate it in the same way that he vaguely makes out that he's listening to his wife when she's telling him something important.

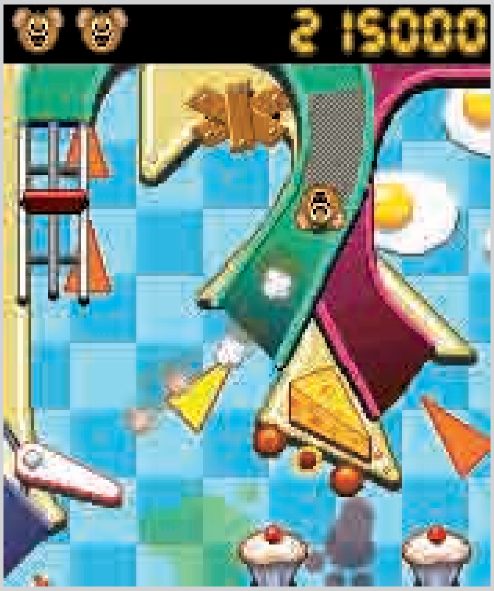
Anyway, *Dig Dug Deluxe* then, is it any good? Well actually, yes. Granted, it's still no *Mr Do!*, and the *Deluxe* version, while very pretty to look at, is otherwise identical to the original, but if you're a fan of *Dig Dug*, then this conversion definitely shouldn't be missed.

Controls are fine, the gameplay is perfectly suited to the mobile format and we even saw Darran crack a smile while he was playing it. Proof that he's finally mellowing with age. Or is it that he's been replaced by a pod person?





TOM AND JERRY: PINBALL PURSUIT



INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** GLU
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PRICE:** £4.99

Yes, the choice of licence is rather unfortunate and not exactly in keeping with a retro magazine, but at least the actual pinball game is pretty good fun.

Spread across three distinct tables and featuring Jerry as the ball, *Pinball Pursuit* is a rather diverting little title and proves that even pinball can work on a mobile phone. Yes, it's all rather simple and lacks many of the options and whizzy effects that are usually taken for granted in most of today's pinball games, but if you're looking for something different, then *Pinball Pursuit* is worth a download. The table design may be bland, and it can seem tough at times, but chasing a high score is just as enjoyable on this as it is on any classic coin-op.



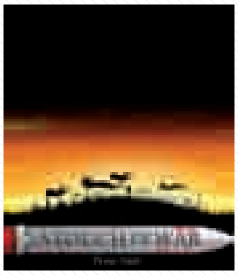
HOMEBREW RATED

WE TAKE A LOOK AT TWO OF THE LATEST HOMEBREW TITLES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE FOR THE NINTENDO DS

A TOUCH OF WAR

WAR NEEDN'T BE HELL

FORMAT: NINTENDO DS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (BETA)
WRITTEN BY: JOHN CHAMPEAU
LINK: WWW.ATOUCHOFWAR.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER



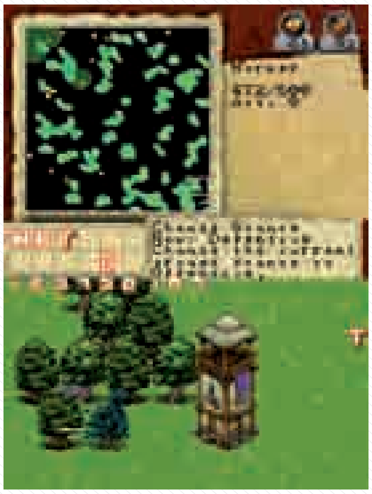
Whenever an RTS emerges, we find ourselves wondering what else the genre can do to keep gamers interested? Then along comes a game like *A Touch Of War* to remind us that the constant addition of new and advanced features could in fact be the problem, and not the cure.

A Touch Of War is a homebrew DS project that's been seeing improvements and bug fixes since 2006. Going old school highlights the over complexity that this genre can suffer in the commercial sector. *Advance Wars* may be excellent, but the constant re-invention of the rules and gameplay can leave players feeling like an outsider – a problem that this free, fun-loving game can't be accused of.

Taking command of an unadorned tribal village, what's immediately noticeable is how *A Touch Of War* harks back to classic Amiga-style titles of the late-Eighties, with categorised characters performing simple, ant-hive-style tasks. Workers build; warriors fight. Gather wood and ore, build your settlement and repel/invade the enemy tribes.



» The shoulder buttons of the DS flip the screens to allow for touch-screen control of all functions.



» A few attitude commands ensure your men act accordingly. 'Defensive' and 'aggressive' covers almost every situation.

The AI ensures your men remain active without constant supervision, but doesn't take an aggressive roll so your hapless band of warriors go rampaging or wandering without specific orders from you. The controls are also simpler: everything is accessible with the touch screen and one of the shoulder buttons, with the navigational convenience of the D-pad, if you so wish.

Certainly not breaking down any barriers, *A Touch Of War* is a simple and nostalgic return to basic RTS. There are bugs, of course, but with a growing, forum-based community and online Wi-Fi play thrown in, this free game is a gem for any fans of the genre who own a flash cart-equipped DS.

RATING: 72%

EVERLASTING LOVE

THE NATURE OF MONKEY…

FORMAT: NINTENDO DS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: BEYOND DS
LINK: HTTP://BEYONDDS.FREE.FR/INDEX.PHP
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER



It's easy to criticise Nintendo for turning out game after game of family-friendly twaddle. But when we see homebrew quickies like *Everlasting Love* for DS, the warmth of fond remembrance for the immortal Game Boy is enough to thaw the cynical bones of the hardest gamer.

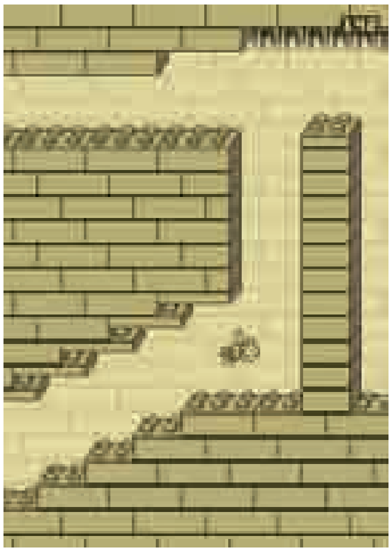


» It really is like looking at a double-height Game Boy screen.

For some reason, it feels weird to see a DS game attempting to recapture the style and feel of the Game Boy so closely (and succeeding). Although the gaming giant's latest handheld has just as much right to pay homage to the old school as any other contemporary system, it doesn't change the fact that seeing the chirpy mini-character and yellow-hued monochrome palette for the first time, never fails to raise a cheeky, nostalgic smile.

Taking control of a vivacious little monkey, players are required to make it to the end of the level in as few jumps as possible. Simple as that. However, your monkey can only move by jumping, and being a lithe little fellow, he clings to any walls or ledges he happens to coincide with during flight (somewhat reminiscent of *Shadow Warriors* on the NES). Although this might seem like a benefit (and it can be), it's every bit as much an obstacle, since clearing some cavernous gaps without jumping into spikes can be tricky if he's not perfectly positioned to begin with.

His take-off point isn't everything though; the cheerful music isn't just there to get stuck in your head. Our simian friend is quite the jive bunny, and nods his head in time with the beat – and affects the height of his next jump. Timing a jump with the beat means he leaps higher, while missing the beat sees him almost roll along the floor. Height isn't everything, of course, and it soon becomes clear that this intriguing platformer is also a rhythm game.



» Acrobatic apes never fail to amuse, eh?

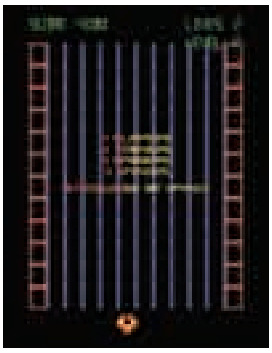
Surely one of the few times these two genres have been so transparently crossbred is reason enough to check out the enigmatically titled *Everlasting Love*.

RATING 76%

A BRAND NEW REMAKE OF G-FORCE TO ENJOY, ALONG WITH A HOMAGE TO WIPEOUT - IN FLASH!

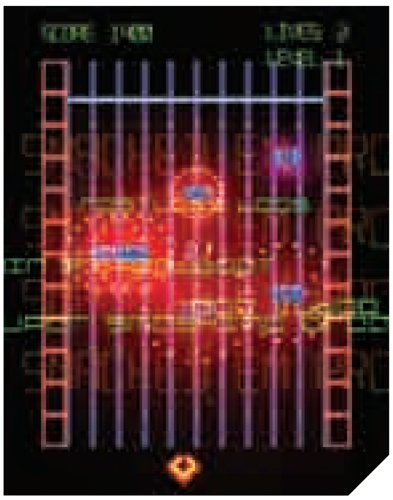
G-FORCE PREPARE TO TRANSMUTE

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: ODDBOB
PUBLISHED BY: ATARIAGE
LINK: WWW.GREATGAMESEXPERIMENT.COM/GAME/GFORCE
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER



Many classic shooters have provided homebrew with inspiration, so it's nice to see someone looking deeper into the past to remake something less well known. Originally on the 8-bit computer systems of the early-Eighties, *G-Force* has received a welcome facelift for the PC.

The gameplay of *G-Force* is akin to a flattened down, 2D *Tempest*, with enemy 'shapes' descending on the player's obscure sprite along predefined vertical-axis rails. The variety of enemies is extensive, with many reacting in very different ways and negotiating the rails in unique, difficult-to-anticipate methods. A 'super zapper' electric-shock bomb can be sent down the length of the rails in times of emergency or panic, while a standard ray gun is employed for typical warmongery.

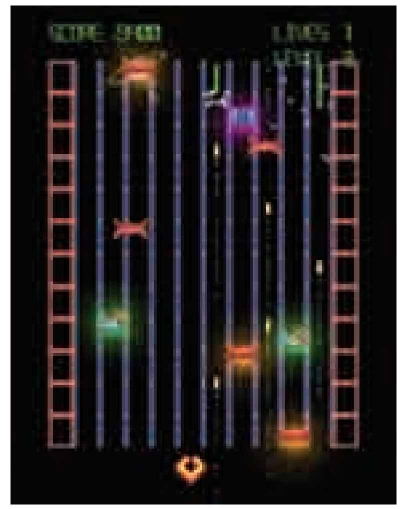


» Geometric shapes never looked so dynamic.

Where the game differentiates itself from its 8-bit grandfather is in the visuals. The screen is quite ablaze with wonderfully liquid explosions and surreal, text-based effects (though some of these effects use rather industrial language, so parents and prudes be warned). After the success of the simple yet highly playable and FX-packed visuals of *Geometry Wars* on XBLA, it's easy to see where inspiration was found for the vector-style graphics of the all new *G-Force* (not to be confused with the classic cartoon, *Battle Of The Planets*). A quiet but effective background techno-hum provides a futuristic, musical aura while fast, dynamic levels keep the intense gameplay white hot.

The quick ascension through the levels is certainly a contributing factor to the game's longevity, since the screen quickly becomes overrun with geometric nasties, and playing for time can become a valuable weapon. *G-Force* takes a wealth of old material and combines it with the popularity of modern arcade traits to give us a fresh and fun-packed few minutes of pure, eye-straining escapism.

RATING: 83%



» Just check out those awesome effects.

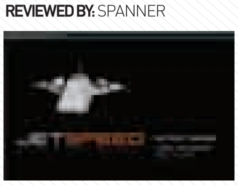
JET SPEED

WIPEOUT IN A FLASH

One reason we continue to play our old games is the embarrassment of riches yielded by designers who've met with severe system constraints. That's not to say hammering tight code into minuscule spaces is a thing of the past. With more fascinating mini-games appearing in your web browser, it's no wonder we're finding top-notch retro titles like *Jet Speed* in our personal, virtual arcades.

Many will think it tenuous to include an ultra-modern Flash game like *Jet Speed* in **Retro Gamer**, but there's no denying its old-school feel; particularly in comparison to 1995's 32-bit futuristic racer, *WipEout*. *Jet Speed* is more retro in style than Psygnosis's original anti-gravity drag racer (being 2D and mostly monochrome), while still incorporating the elements that made the original a classic.

FORMAT: FLASH
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: DX INTERACTIVE
LINK: HTTP://WWW.ALBINOBLACKSHEEP.COM/GAMES/JETSPEED
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER





» Just look at those gorgeous vector graphics.



» Prang your motor five times without destroying a tanker in between and you're toast.

Taking control of your Jet Speeder with simple cursor key controls, the mission is simple but effective. Chase down tankers and offload one of your surface-to-surface missiles, without smashing your motor into too many vehicles along the way. Just like *WipEout*, the dizzying speed and high volume of traffic make this simple brief a difficult, dexterous task to challenge even the most anxious, caffeine-riddled twitch gamer.

Drones scour the anti-gravity highways, scanning for unlicensed vehicles such as your own, and, should you stray into their scanning beam, the DVLA-appointed robot sentries will unleash ten missiles at you in an attempt to encourage proper tax and insurance cover (we might be paraphrasing, here).



» Watch out for these little blighters. It's possible to evade a drone's missile attack… but unlikely.

Accompanied by a superb, pounding techno soundtrack, the slick, dynamic, high-speed chase is surprisingly addictive. While the graphics aren't much, they serve their purpose well, adding an eerie, post-apocalyptic *Mad Max* aura that intensifies the high-octane pursuit. Even the PlayStation is a little out of our emulation reach (certainly during a coffee break spent at your desk), so if you feel like a little pseudo-*WipEout* action, *Jet Speed* certainly won't disappoint.

RATING: 80%

CHOPLIFTER AND IMAGINE'S SUPERB TARGET RENEGADE ARE THE LATEST CLASSICS TO GET THE REMAKE TREATMENT

SAUCERLIFTER

MENTAL MARTIANS

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: DEMO OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: PAUL PRIDHAM
LINK: HTTP://WWW3.SYMPATICO.CA/PPRIDHAM/MISC/TMP/SAUCELIFTER-DEMO.ZIP
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER

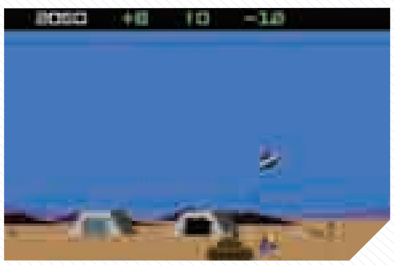




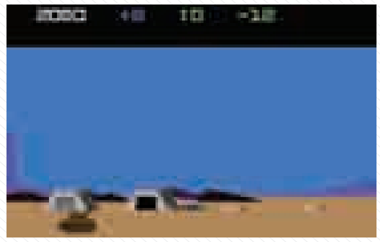
» Pink to make the boys wink. Dupe those gung-ho tanks into freeing your Martian buddies.

It's hard to know which is best when it comes to remakes: a colourful yet faithful representation of the original, or a modern re-imagining using the classic game as inspiration. Certainly in *Saucerlifter's* case we're seeing a superb rendition of the latter, but it's so good it also begs the question 'could the original have been better?'

Us retro gamers know better than anyone that 3D gaming isn't a new concept. Developers have been paddling in these waters since the beginning of digital time, but 2D gamers demand something special from



» The screen zooms out to a panoramic, widescreen camera



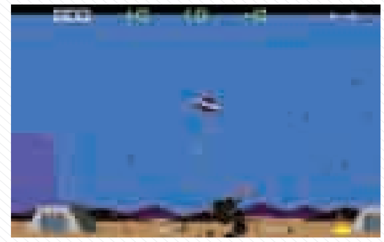
» Land the saucer carefully (although it's amusing to see it skip along the floor when your approach vector is too acute) and

that elusive Z-axis if we're to drop our valuable loose change into a particular coin box.

With *Choplifter*, we were happy for hand-drawn graphics to whiz about the screen, and never felt they were lacking, though looking now at this modern interpretation of the classic Apple II game, it's hard to wonder how much of an impact it could have had were it originally made with the wonderful pseudo-3D vectors seen in *Saucerlifter*.

This kind of flat-shaded, simplistic use of 3D graphics would have been perfectly achievable for the archetypal Eighties game boffin (certainly when it came to Sega's coin-op version) and could well have changed the way we look at 3D gaming for a good many years to come.

Still, at least we have the game now, and although the chopper-based army rescue



» Superb explosion effects and flying debris accompany the destruction of an Earth tank.

has been redeveloped as an alien-abduction rescue mission by Canadian code maestro Paul Pridham, its addictive nature hasn't waned in the slightest. Indeed, the inspired revision of the game's theme, which has been infused with a schlock-tastic B-movie slant, gives players the wry, comical edge *Choplifter* was evidently lacking.

From bubble-headed aliens hoofing it up and down the army base to the hilarious 'skipping stone' physics of a fast-moving flying saucer crashing along the ground and wonderfully cinematic wide screen display whenever the enemies approach, *Saucerlifter* is proof if any were needed that well applied inspiration is infinitely better than reverential regurgitation.

RATING: 89%

TARGET; 2006

THAT'S A WHOLE LOTTA WHORES

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: NATHAN CROSS
LINK: HTTP://WWW.YS3.ORG/?PAGE_ID=2
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER



There's no denying it, streets are at their finest when overrun by thugs and reprobates, not least of all the stalwart vigilantes we so love to portray. And, after his ball-achingly bad jaunt through time, the Renegade is finally back to do what he does best in the remake homage to 8-bit beat-'em-ups, *Target; 2006*.

As we have already mentioned way back in our 'Making Of *Target; Renegade*' feature (reference **Retro Gamer** issue 25), a remake of the classic, unofficial sequel to Taito's coin-op was already under way. This, however, is not it. This is a whole other remake altogether. This remake has recruited the skills of the graphics man from the first attempt (which has since been abandoned now that this version has gone public) namely Dean Swain head of Gamestyle.net and one-time boss of Darran. He has, rather successfully, given the old warhorse a lick of 21st Century paint.

Despite its classic-game status and legion of die-hard fans, *Target; Renegade* hasn't aged as well as some retro titles, so a remake as faithful as this isn't going to bowl anyone over – indeed, it's unlikely that this was ever the development team's intention – though it does worship the genre and the machines of yesteryear quite admirably.

Providing an almost step-by-step re-creation of the seminal Spectrum version (there are no long-haired Commodore 64 girly puffs starring in this one, thank you very much) in glorious colour and with an extra pair of Renegades to keep the action interesting, it'll be hard not to enjoy 20 minutes of kicking and punching without care. The online blurb even suggests six simultaneous Renegades, which would be super awesome when drunk. Although the enemy AI is almost non-existent, the slicker controls take up much of the slack – high-speed back kicking is particularly tasty, and the added subway level is a nice tip of the hat to the original *Renegade*.

It probably won't make the history books quite like the original did, but *Target; 2006* joyously bloodies the noses it intended to. If you were thinking of loading up your Speccy emu for another walk on the wild side, you'd be well advised to give this a fair lash of the pool cue first.



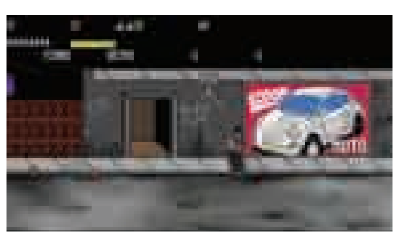
» The all-new subway level admirably harks back to the original *Renegade*.



» Pixel art at its finest, and looks all the better for the extra colours our 8-bit heroes just couldn't afford.



» The hookers have multiplied since the original game, but at least I remembered to bring my mace.



» A brilliant nod to the inspiration of the original *Renegade* sequel, this *Double Dragon* billboard features an updated VW Beetle.

RATING 70%

RICHARD BAYLISS BALLOONACY 2 PROVES THAT EVEN HOMEBREW PROJECTS CAN HAVE SEQUELS

BALLOONACY 2

ONE HELL OF A BALLOON TRIP

Balloons are such fragile things, their life simply expunged by random acts of soft violence. Nowhere is this more clear than in one of Richard Bayliss' latest works, the sequel to the quirky original which saw a balloon trapped within a maze of tricks and traps, having to find the exit on each level to escape.

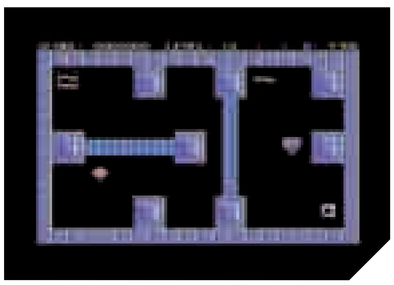
Not much has changed for the sequel. On each of the 16 levels, you must guide the balloon to pick up the key, take it to the lock and then head to the exit. Easier said than done given the hazards present and the fact that the balloon, being filled with helium, slowly rises if left alone. A stout control method is needed to maintain power over the balloon, and should you die (which will be quite common) then it is always your fault. Nine lives may seem a lot but they will be eaten away quite quickly by the design of many of the levels.

Three quid is not much to pay for several hours' worth of entertainment, the value increasing when you consider that one-third of it goes to charity and you get the original game as a bonus on the B-side. There's also a hark back to the Eighties as the game uses Freeload to provide a mix of the Ocean loader theme while the spools turn. This is definitely worth a look.

RATING: **80%**

FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: RICHARD BAYLISS
PUBLISHED BY: CRONOSOFT
LINK: HTTP://WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
PRICE: £2.99 (PAL)
REVIEWED BY: MAT ALLEN





» Simple to look at, but oh so much fun to play.



» Whatever you do, just don't touch the sides!



HARRIER ATTACK

DON'T OVERLOOK THIS EASY-TO-IGNORE GEM



- » **PUBLISHER:** AMSOFT
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



HISTORY

When I first received the bumper pack of free Amsoft titles that came with my CPC 464, *Harrier Attack* was one of the last games I played.

In awe of the huge, cartoon-like visuals of *Roland On The Ropes*, and suitably impressed with the *Amidar*-like action of *Oh Mummy!*, Durell's basic looking shooter didn't get a look-in and it was several days after my fourteenth birthday, when, bored with continually losing at *Xanagrams*, I decided to give *Harrier Attack* a try.

I carefully read through the instructions, took off from the large aircraft carrier and promptly flew straight into the first bit of flak that appeared on screen. Unperturbed by my five seconds of airtime, I immediately took to the skies again, and after another close encounter with an enemy missile, flew straight into the plane that had fired it. This wasn't going to be easy…

And indeed, Durell's blaster wasn't easy – even if the premise itself was simpler than Ardal O'Hanlon's character in *Father Ted*. All you were required to do was fly across a war-torn landscape and destroy as many opposing forces as possible. Of course, the enemy forces were far from defenceless and the sky would be filled with enemy planes and huge amounts of flak. Get hit and you'd immediately explode into several pieces and would be thrown back to the start screen.

What made Mike Richardson's game so fun to play though was that you always felt in control. Collision detection was extremely tight, and when you did fly into an enemy missile, or got caught in a section of flak, you never blamed the computer, just your own lack of self-control.

Eventually, you'd get the chance to refuel on your carrier, ready for another round of airborne mayhem – unless of course you were foolish enough to bomb your own ship as you were taking off (come on, we've all done it at least once).


HIGH SCORE; 000750
FUEL
BOMBS

BARGAIN HUNT

HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month: Master System classics.

CALIFORNIA GAMES
Master System
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **75p**



SPY VS SPY
Master System
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£3.51**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

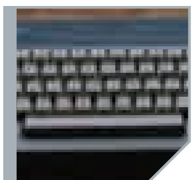
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

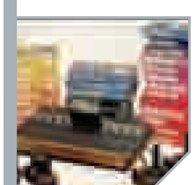


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



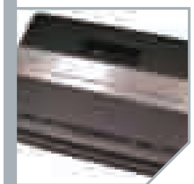
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



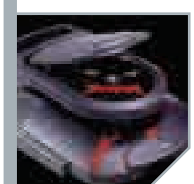
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

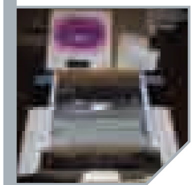


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

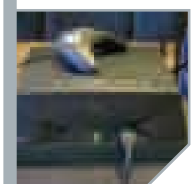
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



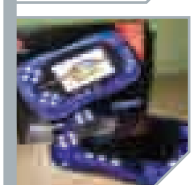
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best-selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

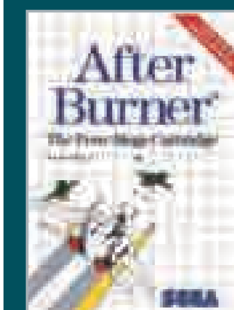


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

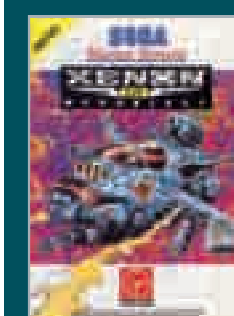
VIGILANTE
Master System
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£12.75**



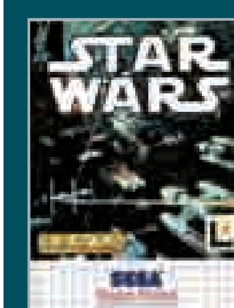
AFTER BURNER
Master System
Normally sells for: **£2**
Ended at **No Sale**



XENON 2: MEGABLAST
Master System
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£23.01**



STAR WARS
Master System
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£16.78**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- THE INVADERS - SEASON 1 DVD
- SPACED - SEASON 1 DVD
- SPACED INVADERS



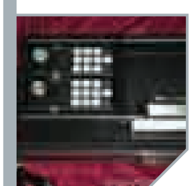
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

More inanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



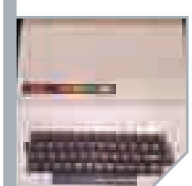
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



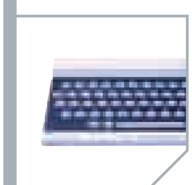
INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



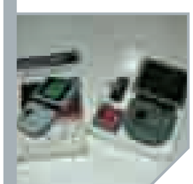
PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



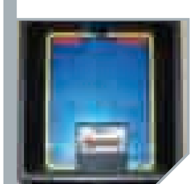
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



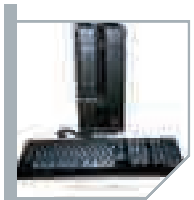
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

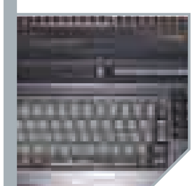
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

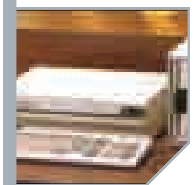
NEC



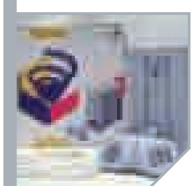
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



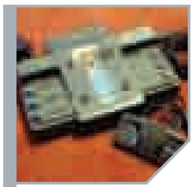
PC ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



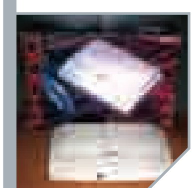
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



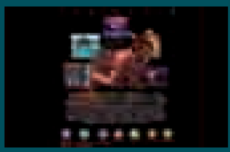
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.



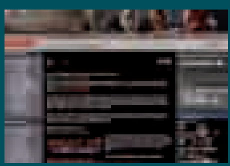
SHARP FAMICOM

RETRO GAMING SITES

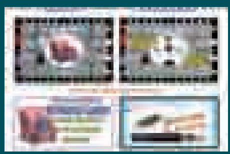
DESTROY ALL MONSTERS
While Shmups.com is the website of choice for most shoot-'em-up fans, there are other great sites. One example is Destroy All Monsters, which features reviews, screenshots and regular updates.
www.stickycarpet.com/dam



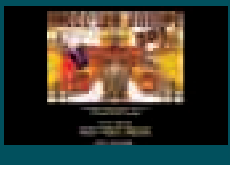
RESIDENT EVIL FAN
After falling in love with *Resi 4* again thanks to the Wii release, we've spent a lot of time at this website. There are facts galore; every game is covered and there's even an encyclopaedia. Fans of this macabre series will be in seventh heaven.
www.residentevilfan.com



WEEKEND GAMER
As he helps us out on our forums, it's only fair we mention the website that Sir Clive is involved in. WG may not boast huge production values, but it's full of energy and is very entertaining. It offers something for everyone and champions games other sites ignore.
www.weekend-gamer.co.uk



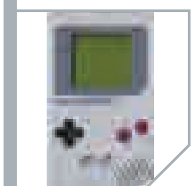
HARDCORE GAMER 101
We've covered HG101 before, but with many recent updates we had to bring it to your attention again. Never afraid to cover the more obscure retro releases, HG101 is essential if you want to learn more about our fascinating hobby.
http://hg101.classicgaming.gamespy.com/



TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



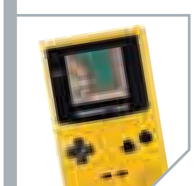
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA
(HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



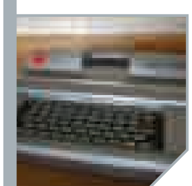
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



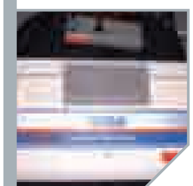
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



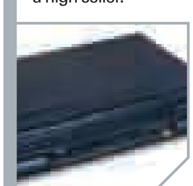
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.
- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.
- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.
- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR



ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.
- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

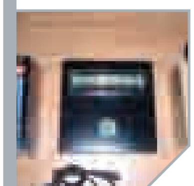


ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.
- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



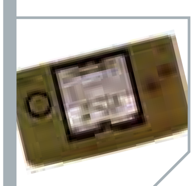
NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)
- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR



NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) (varies)**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.
- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



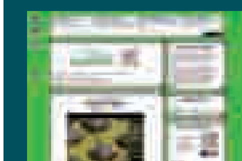
NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS [CAPCOM/SNK]
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM [CAP VS SNK]

RETRO GAMING SITES

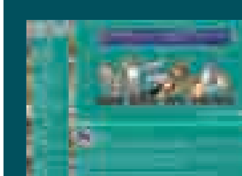
LITTLE GREEN DESKTOP
If you're an Atari ST fan and have recently been seething about all our Amiga 500 coverage, then why not head over too the Little Green Desktop while we put the definitive RetroInspection together? Crammed with reviews, screenshots, and a variety of public domain titles to enjoy, Richard Davey's excellent site is the perfect tribute to Atari's 16-bit machine.
http://www.atari.st/



OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
While our editor in chief spent a week enjoying E3 last month, we used our time well, spending most of it at Old-Computers.com. With a huge array of old computers, it's an eye-opener for those who think computers begin and end with the ZX Spectrum and C64. Great for those into ancient technology.
www.old-computers.com



VIDEO GAME ART ARCHIVE
It's not been updated for over a year now, as owner 'Rlan' is in his third year of university. However, there's still plenty of lush videogame art to drool over. VGAA is console orientated and covers everything from NES to PS3. A great site to see how game covers have evolved over the last two decades.
http://vgaa.emulationzone.org:80/



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

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NEXT

BLOCK BUSTERS!

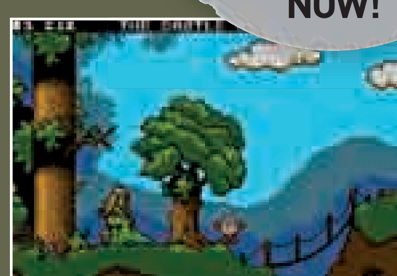
THE MAKING OF… TETRIS

TETRIS CREATOR, ALEXEY PAJITNOV, EXPLAINS HOW A SIMPLE GAME FEATURING CONTINUALLY FALLING BLOCKS TURNED INTO A GLOBAL PHENOMENON THAT'S STILL PLAYED TODAY



OTHER EXCITING FEATURES…

- In a brand new feature we pay tribute to one of the greatest arcade boards ever made – Capcom's CPS II
- With *Space Giraffe* in the bag, Jeff Minter finds time to talk about hit Commodore 64 shooter *Sheep In Space*
- id Software's *Doom* is one of the most influential shooters of all time. **Retro Gamer** looks back at how it helped shape the industry



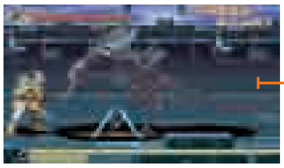
COMPANY PROFILE…

BIG RED SOFTWARE – If you thought that Big Red Software only made *Dizzy* games, you're going to be in for a big surprise.

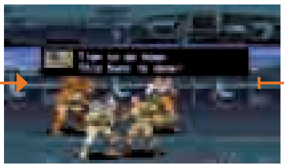


ALIEN VS. PREDATOR

Capcom has made some superb scrolling fighters over the years, but this effort from 1994 is easily one of its best. Find out what happens when humans and predators join forces and give the alien queen a huge (get away from her, you bitch) slapping



SCREEN 1
Massive in size and suitably pissed off because all of her offspring have been killed, this enormous xenomorph certainly isn't going to go down without a fight. Be careful out there!



SCREEN 2
With the queen finally vanquished, both predators and humans decide that the only way to stop the menace once and for all, is to nuke the base from a safe distance.



SCREEN 3
As they all depart for the Predator's ship, the female in the party decides to hang around – probably to put on some make-up so that she can look nice for the imminent explosion.



SCREEN 4
Safely in their ship, the predators send a small package down to planet Earth. It's cargo? Why, it's a great big bomb that will blow the alien's base to kingdom come, and maybe even further.



SCREEN 5
The predators and humans part company, not realising that they'll never star in another scrolling fighter together because Capcom forgot to secure the licence. Doh!